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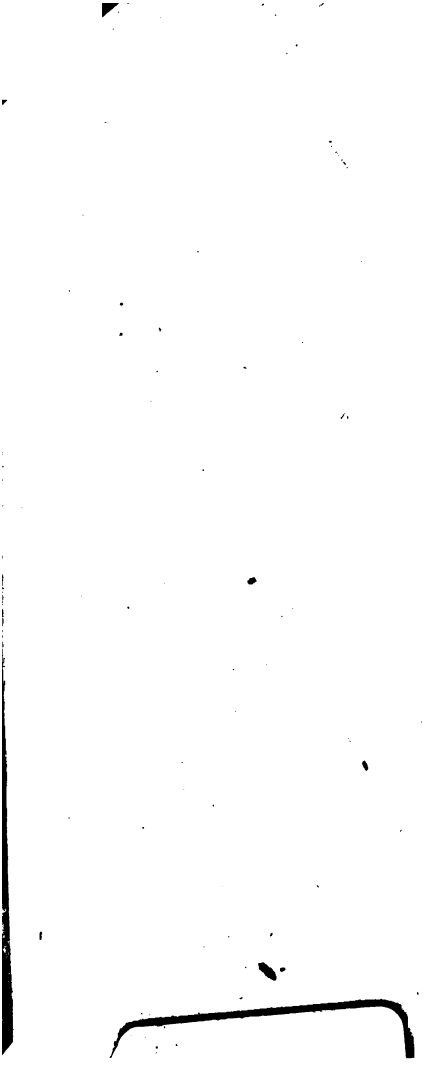

MY FIRST SEASON.

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BY

BEATRICE REYNOLDS.

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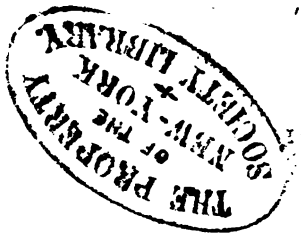

MY FIRST SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

I AM the only child of Anne Vaux, sixth daughter of the sixteenth Baron Ailye; a baron proud of not being an earl—as all the Ailyes are. My mother married a clergyman, whose erudition was remarkable, though he was remarkable for nothing else. He was chaplain at Ashleigh Place, the chief seat of the Ailyes, but never came to town; and although my mother was married at the chapel in the house, I have reason to believe that the union was execrated by her family, as her father never raised my own from his obscure position: which, however, he preferred to any ecclesiastical dignity, with or without ease.

My acquaintance with my mother will begin in heaven; for, marrying late and when in broken health, she died almost at my birth. I believe my father regretted, as I am sure he loved her; for

when I recollect him first his hair was grey, and there were lines upon his brow which only sorrow can draw in the face of a man not forty years of age.

We lived in a small parsonage in a very unfashionable neighbourhood; and only two servants ruled within doors—the one calling herself housekeeper, and certainly confining her attention to the house, for I never knew her put her head out of the window, except to go to church. My nurse was her sister, and as like her as one pea is said to be like another; inasmuch as, thinking air unnecessary for a child, and exercise positively needful, she made me walk before breakfast up and down the nursery with my bonnet on one hundred times every morning. I generally breakfasted in my bonnet, that I might be ready to run into the garden; which she could not forbid me to frequent, though thither she never followed me. I delighted in this garden, where nothing ever flourished, because the gardener only came twice a year; first in spring to weed and roll the walks, and secondly in autumn to lop and train a determinately fruitless vine. Directly he left, the weeds came up again, and faster than ever the stones upon the walks became glued together with snails' slime. In its weedy condition I best liked this garden, and acted in it all sorts of plays, both sacred and profane, with no audience except a pet toad, *which lived in an old* watering-pot that was lined

with cobwebs, and to whose daily wants I ministered by providing it with water and pastry made of mud and grass well mixed.

My first-formed impression, as a child, was that of the day of judgment; which I expected every night when I went to bed, with great curiosity, and not a touch of terror: indeed, considerable disappointment affected me in the morning to find it had not arrived. At four years old I could read in the Bible; a series of prophetical visions occupied my mind, and my heart overflowed with pleasure in that first of all poetry, the Psalms. I was seven years old when one day my father found me preaching to the chairs in his study with his Latin Bible in my hand, and discovered I had an ear for languages. He was himself a prince of linguists, and forthwith he began to teach me Latin grammar. I considered Latin an abstruse game—still a game merely, and the best of all my plays; so much so that, observing Greek to appear even a more abstruse game than Latin, I began Greek too. My father next perceiving that, instead of writing a young lady's hand, I printed all my letters, and sometimes mixed up Greek and English capitals in a word, took away my books, and sent me to a school in the nearest town, intending that I should remain there one quarter to be taught to write, and then return to him. I stayed at school a night and a morning, and ran home the *next afternoon*; my impulse being, not horror of

milk-and-water or backboards—in those days not extinct,—but an innate antipathy I naturally had to a crowd, even during a childhood which has matured into a life whose greatest charm is solitude.

From that hour my father, who never in his life reproved me, taught me entirely himself. Perhaps studious tastes were natural to me: I certainly assumed habits of study, even then.

I was nearly fourteen when my father was drenched in a violent rain-storm, and sat, during a pastoral visit, in his wet dress. His return to his home was for the last time, for he had caught a cold which issued in fever; that fever passed to typhus, and ended fatally. I was with him during his whole illness, which, though sharp, was short; the servants vainly tried to remove me, and at last I was found by them asleep—asleep on the bosom of one who slept no longer, except in death. I remained beside him afterwards, when others had laid him in his study;—it seemed for many days. One morning, as I still sat there, not stunned but sorrowful, a gentleman entered, and led me from the room with a firm yet gentle hand.

CHAPTER II.

The morning after the funeral I found myself for the first time in my life driven in a postchaise through beautiful country. I had seen no sylvan scenes before, and for miles and miles I could not withdraw my gaze even to glance at the pale being who sat beside me: for I had found out he was pale the day before—almost as pale as was my father's face in death. It was Lord Ailye, who was taking me with him, as I soon discovered, to his own home; but I was too inexperienced at that time to be aware of the greatness of his gentle charity in doing so. I had never seen him, scarcely ever heard of him, until after my father died. For some hours after we set out, Lord Ailye was as silent as I, but at last, while I was leaning forward to catch the last bright glimpse of a golden hop ground in the evening sun, he touched my shoulder, then drew me from the window to the seat beside him, and began to talk.

"Did your father speak of his hopes to you? Was his soul at peace?"

I trembled to my heart, for death was still to me a name ineffable. I replied, without consideration, *very bashfully* and foolishly,—

"I do not know, Lord Ailye."

"Do not call me Lord Ailye," he replied, "call me Edward. You must be my child, tall Beatrice: I have four children even now at home."

How young they must be! I thought; for I knew he had succeeded to the title while yet a minor, not many years before; though I knew not so much more about him as whether he had also married. So very young I thought him, to have such deep lines round his dark blue but inexpressibly mournful eyes; the furrows of dried-up tears, as even then I knew. His dark hair had a slight damp curl, and despite his air of reserve, half pride, half sad humility, he was too pale not to touch the heart, while far too handsome not to strike the fancy. So suddenly affected, I took his hand, a freak which seemed to please him, for he smiled.

"You are not well," I said, "Edward;" for I thought he would like to be called so.

"It is well to be ill," he replied, in his particularly dry though gentle tones, "it reminds us of what we must never forget — that we are dust — that while we live we die—that our rest is not upon earth — that faith alone can console us in our weakness."

What has that to do with being ill? I thought; for when I was ill in my little way it was ever my habit to disallow my suffering: to keep it out of sight, *if possible.*

"You have been confirmed, Beatrice?" he resumed.

"Not yet," I answered.

"Of course your dear father prepared you?"

My father, no doubt deeming me a perfect child, had never spoken to me on the subject personally.

"No," I said; then added, fearing to displease my cousin, "but he taught me everything."

Then Edward was speechless for a time, perhaps not knowing what to say.

It was middle summer and yet daylight when we reached Ashleigh Place; though it became dark immediately we passed into the gates, beneath such trees as I had never dreamed of, so broad of girth, so thick in leaf, in such rich, almost sublime variety. Deep calls of rooks filled one long avenue, in another grove doves moaned in mournful concert, a heron soared out of the elms, and squirrels shook the fir spires. The mansion was worthy of its position; placed far within the gates, still environed by a moat and defended by a drawbridge, it was built of stone and brickwork harmoniously blended, in a style in which neither mediæval nor modern architects have designed and dreamed.

We drove past the grand entrance, at which I had hoped we should alight, to a door in one of the wings, and there Edward lifted me himself from the carriage. We entered a small passage, in which stood one grave *greybeard of a* servant, who opened for us the door

of a large room plainly furnished, and then retired into the shade. This room was already lighted for the evening with wax candles in heavy candlesticks of bronze. Two little boys were playing with a puzzle at the table, a young lady of my own age sat before a reading-desk, and a boy older, though not taller than she, was standing before some shelves with a book beneath each arm and another volume in his hand.

"Rowena and George, this is our dear Beatrice. Spen and Willie, come and kiss your cousin," Lord Ailye said, with an authority super-parental; and they all greeted me. The eldest pleased me best, as he ever since has done. His eyes were not blue, like Edward's, but clearest hazel; his hair was brighter; his features were far more beautiful, yet in his beauty there was nothing feminine. Rowena, two years younger than George, was tall and slender, with a quantity of long ringlets, and no expression in her face except consciousness of those extraordinary curls. As for Spencer and Wilton, they were yellow-haired, like their mother, who had been a Gordon—they were not Vaux in any feature.

I drank tea with my cousins in another room at hand, and Edward was present still; besides whom I saw without observing—for I was almost asleep in my chair—that there was a lady making tea, and that two gentlemen were also at the table, with George sitting between them. After tea I was *guarded to the door* of the room in which I was

to sleep, by Lord Ailye himself, who pronounced a benison audibly upon me while he kissed my cheek.

My bed-room was large, a window sunk into a deep recess reached the high ceiling: the dark-red curtains were close drawn, but I directly opened them and the blind besides, that I might see the trees, and the moonlight upon the water in the park. The wing in which I slept was haunted; as I was in due time informed—by the maids of course—not by George, to whom a goblin was ever a rat or a robber: and I certainly heard noises there, whether bred of ghostly company or not. I liked these noises, having never in my life found fear my bed-fellow: and truly as I live, one night long afterwards—the night my first friend died—I saw a soft blue star wander downwards as from the firmament, and melt into azure mist upon the bosom of the lake.

I must not forget to say that a maid knocked at my door the evening of my arrival, and intimated that she was to undress me, if I chose. I refused, not liking to be touched by a stranger, and, sleepy as I was, I went to rest in my clothes, having thrown myself, exhausted, upon the bed. But my room looked eastwards, and the sun awoke me as he rose, shining as from a prism through the arms of Vaux, which coloured the diamond panes of every front window in the house. I got up and undressed, then bathed and dressed again, and bethought myself to examine *the furniture*. It was plain, large, and old-

a drab carpet, dark-red curtains to the bedstead, a square washing-stand, and a toilet-table without a looking-glass were the results of my immediate survey; but a glance more special revealed a large Bible bound in black, placed upon the table; with a concordance and a copy of the Olney Hymns upon either side of it, also bound in black. Above the table hung a black frame; containing a placard bearing in large black letters the inscriptions following:

"Ye know not the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

"Be thou also ready."

I remembered the conversation in the post-chaise the day before, and a gust of curiosity drove me out of the room, early as it was, and down the silent stairs into the great hall, where I found myself for the first time. It was larger than my father's church, and most beautifully carved in oak; but there were blank square spaces on the walls, where it seemed as though pictures had hung, and ought to hang still; the carving being richest round these spaces, as though to frame gilt frames within them. I was standing at the bottom of the staircase when a door opened suddenly, and I saw Lord Ailye, dressed completely, as I was myself, and carrying a Bible, into which his thumb was shut. Strange to say, he did not see me; his eyes were fixed upon the floor as he crossed the hall, and I observed him enter a

room, which I afterwards discovered to be the room in which his father died.

As he closed the door I tried the handle of another, which led me into an immense dining-room, every chair and table in which was piled up in a heap in the midst, while the candelabra were swathed in pieces of the purple damask curtains, and the edges of the yet remaining hangings were bleached with the action of sunlight. There were five deep windows beautifully moulded, and when I tried to open one — for they opened to the ground, — the bolt creaked, so rusty was it from disuse. I forced it, however; but when I had got out of the window to the garden I could not shut it again, and was obliged to leave it open: in advertisement of that tomboyhood which was soon to be crushed within me.

The garden was alleyed and terraced, charming as to its outline, but miserably deficient in flowers; indeed, except roses of the old-fashioned genera, that seem to flourish for ever be they once planted, I found only daises and dandelions. Presently I wandered near a hot-house, but, entering it, I only discovered grapes, which hung in clusters from the roof. Behind the grapery was a strew of frames turned upside down; and beyond them I beheld the trees, over the palings of the park. Next I found a gate, but it was locked, and I was actually about to try to get over it by climbing, when I heard a voice from above, and, looking up, saw George, who was

sitting high up in a tree with a book in his hand. "I'll come down and open the gate," he cried; and down he came and stood before me, with his face glowing like the morning.

"Beatrice!" said he; "Beatrice!"—in a voice that made me admire my own name—and then smiling, he took my chilly fingers in his warm hands: for his hands were warm, though he had come down out of a tree. Then he went on—"Why, how long have you been here, and who in the world called you so early?" I told him it was my own fault; but before I could explain, he asked me to wait for him there while he ran into the house. I did so, and in a very little while he brought me a cup of milk, and filled with biscuits the pockets of my black silk apron.

"We shall get no breakfast until half-past eight," he said, "and that is late enough,—but I should have thought you had lived here all your life, instead of running wild, as Edward says you have been accustomed to do. Beatrice—ah yes, do not think me rude that I call you Beatrice already, before I know whether you'll let me or not: but you are such a true Beatrice;—there are eight in the gallery now, all like you more or less; and as for Miss Rowena, she is more like her own discarded doll than a veritable Vaux."

"Oh, may I see the picture-gallery?" I cried, for my father had spoken to me of the pictures. "May I see it now?" I added.

"You cannot," said George, "nor I either, for it is locked up, and Edward threw the key into the moat about six years ago, or nearly so, when first we came here."

"What did he do that for?" I asked, indignantly.

"Because he says beauty is vanity."

"But all is vanity: not beauty in particular."

"Ah! Mr. Henry was quite right when I asked him about you. Shall I tell you what he said?"

"I don't know who he is."

"My tutor—at least one of them, and the one I care for. He said that my cousin was a young lady of fine talents, but in danger from her courage—a great deal for him to say. However, now tell me, Beatrix Vaux—as you are for all the interposing Reynolds—did you find a looking-glass in your bedroom?"

"No; but I thought, of course, that it was a mistake. Perhaps the maids thought it was a young gentleman coming. I intend to have one, though."

"We do not *intend* at Ashleigh: here there is but one will. I knew, directly I saw you, that they would take away your looking-glass."

"But why so?"

"Because you are too pretty to look at yourself. Edward has good taste though he mortifies it; and he will serve you as he does us, of course."

"Of course?—I shall not stay here."

"I hope you will like to stay, Beatrice; for if Edward says you shall, you'll find you must."

"What makes you call your father, Edward?"

"Did you ever climb a tree?" was his reply. "For you will be standing till you are tired out; and if you want to know how we go on here, I must tell you now or never. You will not be allowed to talk to me before breakfast again, and there is not another moment in which we can be by ourselves. Edward says young persons ought never to be left to themselves,—but I am wasting all our time. Will you come up here?"

"I should like it extremely," said I; to whom it was no fresh exertion, as I had been accustomed to sit on the roof of my father's house without even soiling my pinafore, as it was the pride of my nurse to say. George was perfectly astonished at my success, and I believe I rose in his esteem immediately I mounted. He had climbed before me step by step, and we perched ourselves as safely as two birds upon a branch, so high that I could have counted twenty nests of real birds within a glance. All around were leaves, but through the leaves an azure twinkle stole; and one broad gap in front disclosed a break of country, the fairest I have ever seen—a hill-side pearled with sheep, upon the slopes of which, to this day, I often wander, ankle-deep in moss.

"Now tell me," said I, "about your father."

"He is not my father: we are brothers. My

poor father—well, he was not like Edward, whatever he was. What made you think so?"

"He called you his children, and told me I must be his child. But I have no claim upon him."

"As much as we have. I dare say you will wonder when I have told you, why I stay here—not being a girl, and obliged."

"Indeed! a girl is not obliged to stay."

"Don't be consequential, madam; you will only have to drag your train in the dust. There was a time when I was savage too. Really and truly, Edward—I tell you in confidence, you know—Edward might send anybody mad who was not born an idiot. Yet, Beatrice, he's good: extra good; as good as man can be—at least, he means to be so. He has some right to call us children, for he has been a father to us, and a kind one. He lets us live here, which is a good thing for us, and will prevent our being so very poor some day."

"But you can't be poor with a place like this; and other places, too, papa told me about."

"Not now,—there were; and then Ashleigh was a show-place, and got so out of repair. But when we came here with Edward, he sold the others to pay our debts."

"*Your* debts?"

"Ours," said George, blushing, and looking through the leaves the other way. And then I was sure they were his father's debts Edward had paid.

"Of course it makes a great difference to him, for he has not thrown us over, as most men would have done; he brings us up entirely, and saves what money we have. He is not in a mess now, however; and the reason he lives so quietly, and has not entered public life, is not because he is so generous to us: he never goes to town because he thinks it wicked to mix in the world. I told Mr. Henry one day that he might as well persuade Edward to go to town, because he would have more opportunities for doing good, &c., in London than in the country. But Mr. Henry says that what Edward would explore in London would turn his brain, and perhaps kill him, and that the care of his tenants and ourselves is quite as much as he can do. Edward is so horribly conscientious, and so dreadfully melancholy with it, that—you will think me the most ungrateful and the meanest wretch if I go on any more."

"I shan't; it does not interfere with your loving him. Everybody can't agree with everybody."

"And Edward will not marry, on our accounts—at least, so he says. But I don't think he would marry anyhow."

"But you seem to have a great many persons living in the house."

"Yes; and I was going to tell you that Rowena's governess is no trouble at all, though she is under Edward: she does not see half her time, and the

other half she does not hear. Mind, I do not say such things to Rowena, for she would not understand; but you do. You saw Mr. Henry; what do you think of him?"

"Your tutor, I suppose?—but I saw two."

"Yes; Wrench came for classics and mathematics, and he is called chaplain; but he never preaches, as we go to the parish church, and he never has any opportunity of lecturing, for Edward has prayers himself. However, Wrench is harmless, and I never say a word against him, as he cannot help being stupid; and what I know of Greek I learned from Mr. Henry. For Latin, Wrench may stand. You know I might have gone to Eton for less than Edward pays these two to keep me here."

"I should have thought you would like Eton best; I should if I were a boy."

"I should think so; and, though you may not believe it, I can tell you I was just going to run away altogether, when Mr. Henry came."

"But why do you have two tutors, then?"

"I never ask why, for fear of losing one."

"You are very fond of him, then?"

"Fond is a girl's word—but I would die for him. I hope he will teach you: he teaches Rowena French and German; but she don't learn either—she can't. Perhaps you will, for I know you can."

"Yes, I can learn languages, papa said. I mean to study all."

"That will do for Mr. Henry. If persons don't love learning they ought not to be taught—so *he* says. I told you I would not have stayed here if he had not come, and now I would rather live here all my life with him than get out into the world and lose him there. But he puzzles me sometimes; for you know he can't possibly care so much for me as to stay for my sake alone."

"I suppose he likes teaching."

"No more than I should naturally—at least, to do nothing else, you know! He has great power over people, and he makes Edward behave quite small; but there's nobody to control, besides, at Ashleigh, and if he loves influence he can't exercise it. He teaches everything; for I do believe there is nothing he does not know, and I think his manners finer even than Edward's. He's an exile, though, and that may have something to do with his remaining here, if he wants, as perhaps he does, to be out of the way. You know all about the Poles—Kosciusko is Mr. Henry's hero, and I think he's full of fighting blood, for he sets his lips hard and blushes red to his brows when we read of battles in the Greek books. I think, don't you, that all Poles are heroes—not only Kosciusko. I only wish we might pick some quarrel which should get us into war with Russia; I long to fight the Russians—to crush them, for their own sakes and Poland's too."

"I don't know anything about the Poles except

that they were shamefully treated. I only read ancient history with papa, and English and French history—papa said hardly any person is up in early French history. Will you tell me about the Poles, if you please?"

"I can't, but Mr. Henry can, and I will ask him to do so; it would take too long to give you even an outline. I often wonder why he remains in an inglorious retreat like this—why he does not try to get up something for the Poles. He never has a single letter, do you know, Beatrice; and every Saturday evening he goes out alone—the only times he don't ask me for my company: and I dare not ask him for his. Where he goes it is impossible to discover: of course one would not wish to do so, but I must say I wonder."

"Perhaps he has a wife," I sagely suggested, "and some children, he goes to see after."

"Impossible! As if Mr. Henry would ever live away from his wife and children! He would have taken them to America, and he would have made his fortune there. Besides, I asked him once if he never intended to marry, because his descriptions of all the beautiful and celebrated women are so well drawn; and he said he thought not, indeed he had never given the subject a moment's thought. And to tell truth, I daren't ask him many questions for fear he should not like it and should go away."

"What do you mean to be when you grow up?'

I asked; having a settled impression that to be *nothing* at all was odious.

"I mean to be a soldier in time of war, and a statesman in time of peace—at least, I wish to be; but I dare say it is impossible. Mr. Henry says he could promise me either in perfection, but not both together. And I suppose, Beatrice, you are ambitious, as you ask me whether I am."

"I can't be a statesman, and papa said he thought female politicians were detestable. Well, I should like to learn more than any woman ever knew, and to write books mistaken for a man's."

"Ask Mr. Henry, then—or I will, and he'll tell you whether you can. He knows everything about everybody."

There was a good deal more of this conversation, very dull doubtless except to the talkers themselves; and which may seem, on George's part, more like an innocent grown-up man than a clever boy's chatter. However, the life apart from other boys he led, and the hours passed in the society of so accomplished and dignified a person as I found Mr. Henry to be, had rendered his pupil quite an excelling specimen of what true education can achieve under the most favourable auspices. It was certainly remarkable to find that George liked talking to me as he would have talked with a boy companion —perhaps better, for his ideas of ladyhood were naturally loyal, and that leaven of vulgarity and

bearishness which ever mingle in a mixed community of youth, had no more tarnished the chivalry of his behaviour than it had polluted his pure vocabulary with slang or innuendo.

He was still going on about Mr. Henry, as though no other tutor had ever flourished, when this gentleman himself came underneath the tree, and called to George, not knowing I was there. George sprang from his seat directly; but, despite the attractive cause, he helped me to the ground with patience, and when we got there introduced me to his master on the spot. As Mr. Henry, after bowing gravely, followed behind us until we reached the house, it was impossible for me to examine him then.

In the study, each person was seated in a chair against the wall, and the whole household had so met —twelve women, six men, and a couple of pages, the governess, the classical tutor, and the children. All present held their Bibles in their hands, and Edward sat before a Bible in the midst. Lord Ailye prayed long before reading, after reading expounded longer, and then prayed while we knelt. This service was before breakfast, and lasted just an hour.

CHAPTER III.

My life became immediately routine. It was not a variation from routine that I saw Lord Ailye alone in the evening, for it happened to be Saturday the day after I arrived, and on Saturday each of his children had an interview with him, to be questioned, admonished, warned,—never, by any chance, to be praised. Rather impatient to hear what he would say, I took my seat in his library; a library containing no books except on divinity and history—that is, the books of divinity and history which all baptized men read. The rest of the magnificent though miscellaneous collection made by the chiefs of his family before him, had undergone cremation upon the hearth in the great hall; except the Vaux MSS., which related to illustrious deeds, if anti-pacific ones—and the genealogical tree, a map of which displayed its proportions to the least small spray, wide open upon the library wall.

"I am glad to see you, Beatrice," he began, in a mournful voice, that had the effect upon me of making me feel I *must* laugh, though I dared not even smile. "You know why I wished to see you here."

"No," answered I, sincerely.

He proceeded, in a still more plaintive tone,—

"I fear, Beatrice, that you have led a very thoughtless life. I love you, but if I did not desire to draw you to my heart, I should still be anxious for your spiritual safety. I fear you do not consider the one thing needful as the only thing; and I have observed, already, that you are eager about trifles. Oh! my child, remember the choice you have to make!"

I remember having looked in the morning, while Edward was in the room, for a pair of combs which had fallen from my hair while I was playing with the little ones; combs, of course, were trifles, but I recollected no choice requiring consideration just then.

"I am very sorry," I said, "that you were vexed about those ridiculous combs; but you know I have not much money, and must take care of my things: gentlemen do not know how dear combs are—proper combs, real tortoiseshell, of a nice shape. I don't know what you mean about a choice."

"There is no compromise, Beatrice;—between heaven and hell."

Some children would have been terrified into discretion by the intense pathos of his tone. I felt inclined to smile, but with difficulty prevented myself. I said,—

"I wish, Lord Ailye, that you would not talk about those things; papa never did—I mean in *that* way."

"You are then in a state as sad as I suspected. I fear, I greatly fear, that it would not be to heaven, if you were taken now. You have had a lesson lately which you ought not so easily to forget."

"I have not forgotten—but I cannot speak so aloud, to you."

"Unhappy child! and more unhappy father!"

"He is not unhappy—he was not unhappy!"

"Beatrice, my own father lived a wild life, and died a hard death: the end of transgressors is hard, and he transgressed, repenting not. Shall I, a worm, presume to screen him in my own heart from divine justice, because I loved him? As Christians our affections must be crucified."

"It was the disciples who were to give up children, and fathers, and houses. I could have done so to follow one who was despised and rejected!"

"Then, where is your faith, Beatrice, if you could not *now* give up all?"

"Well, Edward, then I do not understand why you went to pray in the room in which *your* father died!"

He started; the rigour of his aspect yielded, he laid his hand on mine.

"My child must not be curious—and such curiosity is unpardonable."

"I am not curious: about other persons' concerns I never care to know; but I could not help seeing you, for I was coming downstairs as you went into

that room, and if you had not been looking down you would have seen me. I asked your brother what room it was, certainly; but I did not tell him I saw you: I do not gossip, Lord Ailye."

He withdrew not his hand, but pressed mine.

"Beatrice, you think too highly of yourself. You mistake natural pride, which is born of the devil in you, for that purity, falsely called honour, which none but the converted possess, and then not of themselves. It is the curse of our blood—it blackens and deepens the stain of original sin. I feel for you, as I have struggled with pride even from my birth, and with an agonizing struggle! I feel for you, Beatrice, for great is your temptation; but my child, when you are tempted to yield to it, heap dust and ashes upon the altar of your heart, and kneel in prayer."

"I beg your pardon, Edward: I thought you would not like any one to know I saw you. Besides, we are to pray in secret, *that* we may be rewarded openly."

My possessing imp was of too subtle stuff for the intellectual perception of Lord Ailye.

"Beatrice, I do not pray beside that bed because I think that my prayers will avail to lighten for a single instant, throughout eternity, the just torments of any lost soul!"

"Then it is on your own account you pray, Edward."

Despite my irritant remark he yet relaxed.

"Dear Beatrice, you have a warm and hopeful heart! May the Lord draw you with the cords of his love early—may the condemnation of a sinful life be spared you! So narrow is the way—may your feet be set in it! So very few find it—may you be one!"

"But every one who thirsts may come to the waters, Edward—and all the weary rest, if they only will!"

He sighed, his forehead seemed to grow more narrow, the line of his lips was almost lost between their pressure. I went on, taking advantage of his momentary pause.

"May I learn German, Edward, of George's tutor?"

"How could you know anything about George's tutor, Beatrice?"

"I asked him, and he told me;—don't be angry, it was my fault."

"You have been wasting time already, then, alas! I have no objection to your learning of Mr. Henry, for he is a Christian, and humble in his own eyes."

I had a suspicion, even then, that this humility was but a Christian name for the modesty which is ever the sheltering leaf to the flower of life called genius. But I had also learned already only indirectly to contradict my noble cousin. Fearful of a relapse, I went on as fast as possible.

"How long am I to stay here? This is not curiosity; but you see I cannot help wishing to know—for I cannot be dependent."

"We must not talk of these things to-night, on the eve of the Sabbath; on Monday I will find time to tell you as much as it is needful you should know."

"I need to know everything; I can't go to bed, nor, I am sure, think about Sunday, unless you tell me. It is cruel of you not to tell me; and you will, won't you, Edward?"

He took hold of my hand.

"You have not enough money to live upon alone, my child; but that is nothing, as you are mine. If you had, you would still remain here."

"I would not, one hour. How much have I really, then? Papa told me my mother had none because she married him, but that he had saved a little."

"Yes, seventy pounds a year," replied Edward, rather haughtily, as it struck me, not on account of the money being so little, but because my mother had changed her name to mine.

"I could go to school for seventy pounds a year, and buy my clothes," remarked I, feeling rather inclined to pique him; "and when I grow up I can be a governess, as many ladies are."

I was not prepared for the sudden darkness which overspread Lord Ailye's white complexion: he

frowned horribly; he clutched my hand, which before he had lightly pressed.

"Beatrice! how dare you disobey me? how dare you call in question my decision? how dare you, above all things, mention such a suggestion as you have just made. A Vaux never worked for bread, nor ever shall—it has been ordained that it should not be necessary, and it never shall be!"

"It might not be unnecessary, Edward, and might just have to be. I am a Reynolds, not a Vaux, and therefore it would not signify."

"While with a Vaux you are a Vaux, and have to respect his will accordingly. Not a word more on the subject."

"Now I do believe that you have struggled with pride 'even from your birth;' and perhaps *you* will believe I have no pride to struggle with."

For the first time I here saw Edward laugh; but he turned his head aside, and when he looked at me again, he frowned.

"This is not the strain of conversation for Saturday evening. The rich and the poor are alike God's creatures; and though the lowly be his favourites, he does extend his love to those more pitiable, the lofty. He himself made and registered degrees and rank; the Saviour himself regarded them."

"He was a prince of the house of David, Edward, but he worked in a carpenter's shop."

I believe young gentlemen are more prudent than

young ladies; for George assured me he had never gone so far. Perhaps it was as well for my after peace that I took such a stand at once. Edward covered his face with his hands, and mused: perhaps upon me; perhaps for once he felt helpless: at all events, he returned not to the charge that night; but having read and prayed with me a while, dismissed me to my bed.

CHAPTER IV.

It has been said there is no royal road to learning; but I myself have trodden it, and could tell bright stories of that secret path, which none can find nor keep unless their feet be set therein by the strong intellect or genius crowned with its success. Fed perpetually by the fresh fountains of my teacher's wisdom, I fainted not upon the heights of knowledge; and the rich fruits of his experience have dropped among the laurels which I snatched upon the summit of those hills.

I have now lived long enough, and have seen enough of sorrow and of care, to know that it is possible, if one has a heart, to live perfectly contented without the indulgence of passionate love,—

but impossible, if one has an intellect, to exist without intellectual sympathy.

As Lord Ailye never allowed young persons to be alone together—the conversation I held with George in the tree-top being the single exception to an enduring rule,—I could not ask whether I was always to be subjected to the companionship of Rowena while taking lessons. This companionship I sincerely detested, and not without reason; for her disposition irritated mine, and her indolence oppressed my intellect. Therefore, as George's room was underneath my own, I wrote a letter of complaint and inquiry, by the light of the rising sun, and as soon as I heard his shutter open, I lowered it by a thread until it touched his glass, when of course he opened his window and drew it in. His answer he conveyed to me the next evening, at prayers, in his Bible, which he exchanged for mine under pretence of politely finding my place. I just mention this as a hint to parents and guardians, that if they insist on unnatural measures during their necessary authority, the results will be contempt for unnecessary restrictions, and an insincere recourse to what is naturally hateful to a noble child—deception in every form.

George informed me that Mr. Henry said if I learned under him as successfully as I had begun to study under my father, he would soon give me lessons with George alone, instead of with Rowena as hitherto. For this end I could have sacrificed my

sleep entirely; but it was only necessary to do so in part. My memory is naturally strong and my head clear; I can learn anything I choose, provided I have to attain some knowledge beyond what I simply learn. And I discovered my anti-poetical temperament early; for I could learn much better during the morning hours, even just after sunrise, than in the times of twilight or of darkness.

While I took lessons with Rowena, her governess, of course, was present. Rowena was very giddy, and the discipline employed by Edward to mortify her frivolous tastes only deepened her tendency to folly. She pined and groaned after amusement—which is certainly as necessary to some natures as application is agreeable to others; and not finding anything to do at Ashleigh except what persons were set, or set themselves to do, she relapsed into sulky indolence, which impaired her prettiness and did not improve her bearing. Her exercises were ill-written, crooked-lined, and blotted—at least those she wrote for Mr. Henry. He seldom made erasures, or called attention to her carelessness; which was evidently the habit of her being. He seemed too patient to satirize, and as if his nature rejected all compromise with a person who would not or could not learn. Let it be remembered that, strictly conscientious as he was, he frequently urged upon Edward the propriety of Rowena remaining under female tutorage only; but Edward would not submit to this arrangement, for

he could not be made to understand why Rowena should not get on as well as George—or, at least, as well as I did.

Our master might not have suited some natures, and could not have instructed many; though he was capable of controlling any number of individuals. His distinct realization of the faculties he perceived, and exact estimate of their possible augmentation, were only less remarkable than his method—neither rule nor trick—of conveying the information he bestowed.

As for the voice which embodied his instructions, or his more rare oracular utterances, it had much to do with the effect produced upon those, who while they listened to him learned of him. It was a vibrating weighty tone, yet of peculiar softness; while the articulation, though foreign, was facile and unconstrained. Accustomed to these sounds, I learned to disdain the charms of the most laboriously chastened elocution, and the studied modulations of the popularly eloquent even fret me.

To study with him languages—he master, I believe, of all—was as subtle a delight as to listen amidst the glaciers for the echo of the Ranz des Vaches, or in the Vale of Tempe to pluck the violet. No fantastic imagery this; for he infused into his lessons the very poetry, and charm, and genius of the tongue he taught. He never taught more than one language on the same day; and in his way we devoted a

whole day's study in every week to each language,—the only plan, I believe, which answers the same purpose as travelling in different countries. The teacher, however, in this case must be a traveller too, and as much at home in that he teaches as the learner is in his native tongue. I went with George a long way, and in many paths not traversed by women—at least in modern times,—from ethnic philosophy to the political economy of Christendom, and every sphere of science.

Mr. Henry's character was as pure and simple as his intelligence and acquirements were universal. In creed he was a Christian who really followed in his master's steps; faultless in conduct, he was one of the few for whom law was not made; being in love a pitying angel, in faith a seer. Ever avoiding controversy with those who thought not with him, or not so far as he, he yet contrived, by delicate tact and refined perception, to soften the asperities and relax the rigour of our formal training—a training which might have proved fatal to a child of genius, but which was very excellent, no doubt, for common clever minds like mine and George's.

The slighter characteristics of our master were even engaging, and a few inconsistencies of taste lent a quaint fascination to his behaviour: such as a love for floriculture and a detestation of botany,—an adoration of nature and a contempt for modern art,—a preference for imaginative prose rather than for

metrical poetry. He delighted in dogs, and abhorred cats: in this one point his chivalry failed, as cats will for ever be the crest of virgins, wise and foolish. George and I were wont to remark that he was like the Israelites in the wilderness, for his raiment never wore, nor did his shoes wax old;—he seemed never, or scarcely ever, to require new clothes. He was sufficiently patient, for an exile so proud of his paternal land; whose doom seemed to deepen his passionate desire to return thither but to die. At that time how much we wondered and speculated why he remained in England; having—as we thought and arranged for him—no ties in this country.

Enough of this. A great cause of our perhaps premature acquaintance with books other and wiser than those young persons generally read, was that Mr. Henry possessed among his slight incumbrances one cherished case of volumes, so rare as to be found but seldom in public and scarcely ever in private libraries. These books were in many languages, and none of them had been translated; while Mr. Henry would cunningly and mysteriously read us choice bits here and there, but would never translate these either. So, desperate to get at the meaning his melodious accents actually kept back from us, we would study harder than ever a tongue we had already attacked; and even begin a fresh one on purpose.

CHAPTER V.

Rowena and I were seventeen the same year; we were extremely unlike in most, yet resembled each other in some respects; for instance, we were both quite ignorant of the word, in so far as that we had not seen nor communicated with a single soul except those constituting the household at Ashleigh Place. We were still going on as usual, in routine which seemed immutable, when a change took place, tremendous to us, and affected by no mortal agency.

Edward's life was consistent from his cradle to his grave; if he never relaxed in his discipline of others, he yet more rigorously restrained himself from all that makes life joyous or sensation rapture. Few years did the work of many upon his frame; for not only was he predisposed to disease, it had long reigned secretly within him. The tragic contraction of his opinions never rendered him absurd, even for a mind most susceptible to the ludicrous; because his conduct was without a flaw: his heart, which seemed so cold, perhaps had not *strength* to feel. I might have puzzled over his character to the present hour, but for the hints of one whom I never knew misjudge a single person, and who excelled any I have ever known.

A week before George came of age, I went one morning into Edward's room, for the purpose of consulting him about an entertainment which was upon that occasion to be provided for the tenantry in the park; this being a dissipation which, less developed, had been our carnival each season until then.

Lord Ailye was not in the library, nor had the servants seen him, nor could he be found in any room to which I had access. Then I went into the study, and questioned Mr. Henry, who was writing a letter, but was kind enough to answer me.

"Lord Ailye is ill," he said; "I am writing for the physician."

Yet I had seen him at prayers that morning, and thought him looking as he always did.

"Is he worse? He is never well, I know, and I have often wondered why."

"Do you know that your cousin Lord Ailye has never been out of pain for a single hour in his life?"

"Good heavens!" I cried, despite my Puritanic breeding. "No person could live in constant pain for six and twenty years!"

"They might not live much longer."

I was amazed; stricken with awe and surprise.

"But I fancied you did not like him," I said, with ingenious impertinence; "I thought you did not agree with him."

"I go beyond him perhaps—he will soon be beyond me."

"Will he die, then? I never thought of that."

"What we call dying;—how unlike death to him!"

"I should like to know what makes you speak so now, for you think and teach so differently; your views of life are wide, as wide as the world,—and his are narrow, as narrow as the grave?"

"I see from the mountain, because I am in perfect health. Lord Ailye watches from the valley, and through the mist besides; for his brain is enfeebled: pain has subdued his spirit."

"But this pain,—is it natural? is it just?"

"The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children——"

I needed to ask no more.

George came in half an hour afterwards, in dismay which he could not hide; for he, too, had missed his brother. The house was raised, and every person scattered straightway, within and without. Mr. Henry went forth with George, and he took the right direction.

His knowledge of the habitude of character led him at once to the tomb of Lord Ailye's father in the chapel, where no one had thought of looking because it was never used. On the stone beneath the monument lay Edward, either fainting or asleep: when he was placed upon his bed he still remained unconscious. The physician for whom Mr. Henry had sent had watched Edward many years; though we never

knew it, or had seen him, as Lord Ailye consulted him at his own house in the county town: this fancy of an invalid was perhaps a relic of the pride he abhorred in himself

Lord Ailye awoke, but never rallied. His affairs had been arranged for years. No words but the gentlest and the softest passed those stern lips when they smiled their last upon us.

I went into my room alone as the twilight deepened into darkness, not caring to take a lamp when we all were so hurried and so hushed; and from my window then, though I know not the hour nor the minute, I saw the azure light of which I have spoken before, when a cloud covered the face of the sky, and the moon had long since set. I told George of it three hours afterwards, while we were sitting up together, quite expecting to be disbelieved; but he started, and burst into tears. It was midnight when I for the first time heard the legend of the family—which I here preserve, in memory of one whom it was impossible to regret in death.

"Ranulf de Vaux, the lily of chivalry and the blood-red rose of war, entered Jerusalem with Godfrey, on the 15th July, 1099. The hot march fevered his body, weakned after many wounds, and he could not reach the Holy Sepulchre. Then he cried sore to see Christ's Light, crossing his hands upon his breast. And the heavens opened in the east, and the same Star that was over Bethlehem

came out and stood straight over him, and shone down into his breast. And the Star found no evil in his breast, and no love nor lust, only the lily of chivalry and the blood-red rose of war. And a voice came out of the Star, and said, 'What wouldst thou in thine hour?' And he answered, 'I would sink into the earth where I lie, that no infidel may handle me.' And the star went down into his breast and burned up his mortal body, and sank with the ashes into the earth.

"And Edyth de Vaux, his mother who bare him, was at her tower of Ayslye in the Islands of the North. And she, praying towards the east for her son to God-Christ, saw a star, not like other stars, fall out of heaven into the water that was nigh the tower; and she saw, in a dream that night, Ranulf de Vaux, with a star on his breast, and lilies and roses in his crown, standing on a place where there was no land. And when a Vaux shall die a virgin, with his hands crossed upon his breast, the star shall fall, in token that he goeth to God-Christ without spot; but the Star sinks with his ashes into the earth."

CHAPTER VI.

By Edward's will, which of course could not affect George, I shared in every arrangement that could benefit his sister and brothers. The two young boys were to be left under the care of their classical instructor, who was also clerical; while the only feminine relation in whom the late Lord Ailye had confided, was to take charge, until we came of age, of Rowena and of me.

This lady was sole daughter of the only brother of Edward's father, and therefore so slightly related to me that I could not have claimed the kindness she extended to me forthwith. Having received my impressions of her from Lord Ailye, I could not possibly have conceived how unlike them she really was. She had corresponded with him from time to time; but these communications had not once been superseded by a personal interview, since I went to Ashleigh.

We were told that she was engaged, as every righteous mother should be, in training an only son in the way he ought to go; and sometimes Edward had read us passages from her letters to him, which breathed a piety far warmer than his own—the free

personality of which, and its really amiable ardour, no doubt afforded him relief.

A prescience must have possessed him, that it would be impossible to prevent our ultimately discovering that the world we lived in was larger than Ashleigh Place; and for our initiation, he had endeavoured to bespeak a person who would hoodwink while she chaperoned, and keep our garments white, as she had preserved her own. Never shall I forget the morning on which she dawned upon us: I discovered that her piety differed as much from his as the wayside mile-stone from the Corinthian capital.

When a travelling carriage deposited her at Ashleigh a fortnight after the funeral, we were all at a loss how to receive her; except Mr. Henry, who took everything upon himself in the way of entertainment and explanation, and whom she treated as if he were a foreign envoy on a visit of courtesy to her own court, she being queen. But I discovered afterwards that this intense punctilio was only exercised by her towards him because she knew him to be a tutor in the house. In her etiquette, this position of his implied that she considered him beneath her, and *therefore* she treated him in a style as if he were above her — an illogical form of high breeding adhered to by her ladyship like a Persian or a Mede.

While she ate luncheon, she discussed and settled everything,—made the most heart-rending allusions to Edward, and called George Lord Ailye in a breath,

—languished one moment after palm branches and hymn-tunes played on harps, and the next signified her intention of carrying us to town that afternoon, because she could not sleep in a haunted house nor in a strange bed. She certainly bore off Rowena and me, so that we reached her house in London between two and three next morning; we were both fast asleep, while she was as fresh and wakeful as though just strengthened for the day by ten hours of undisturbed slumber.

Lady Barres was a widow, who concealed, if she felt, any lingering regret for a husband she had lost before the birth of an only child. I did not know, until I became acquainted with this consolation of his mother, that his father had been killed in a steeple-chase; and, until subsequently undeceived, I fancied that this inauspicious event was the reason Lady Barres had remained a widow two-and-twenty years: she having been married at the mature age of sixteen.

I soon found that she loathed any kind of disturbance to her indolent, dreamy life: she suffered neither poverty nor passion to ruffle its calm; she even abjured changing the fashion of her dress—one very graceful upon her, but which was imitated by others in her own position without the same successful result. It consisted almost always of levantine, with demi-train, and under-petticoat of white brocaded silk *peeping through* its open front; the hair showing the *shape of the head,* and confined by a narrow band of

black velvet across the brow, fastened in the morning with onyx or agate, in the evening with a brilliant only. She always wore upon her wrists delicate bands of cambric, embroidered with seed pearl so minutely fine that it seemed a pattern wrought out of the threads of the stuff; and little pearl tassels drooped at her wrists, scarcely eclipsing her hands in fairness.

I need scarcely say Lady Barres would put up with no kind of scene. I never gave her any trouble of this kind; but when Rowena gave way to her feelings, as young ladies in society sometimes will, she always locked her into her room, went out for a drive, and did not return for several hours.

Lady Barres was a person of the best ton, rather than thorough-bred; which means that, though a prince, the cream of royalty, had once or twice honoured her hand by touching it with his glove in a cotillion, the King Cophetua would scarcely have discerned a desiderated consort beneath her tatters, had she been a "beggar maid." She was rank-ridden, aristocratic to the core; the evidences of her "blood" being hands and feet as white as lilies: of which she was so openly vain, that I have seen her sit for an hour in her dressing-room with her shoes and stockings off, and her feet displayed on a cushion of crimson velvet, while she coaxed me with the eloquent gestures of her hands, or rallied—which was *her method of* scolding—in her soft, ineffably polished

tones. She was plain in features, but her head was beautiful; and her natural langour gave the impression of a being less busy by far than I found she really was. She was not less fitted by nature than by her courtly experience to introduce those ciphers of civilization, young ladies not yet out, to the splendid circumstances and serious absurdities of the circle she adorned; which, perhaps, all who can should enter: at least in youth.

She was much afflicted because she could not introduce us immediately, as we were constrained at present to seclude ourselves; but she lightened our mourning, and diversified our retirement as much as possible by all kinds of inventions for our orthodox amusement. Within this pale came an altar-cloth for the church upon her son's estate: such compositions are now of every day achievement; they were then exceptional, and filled the feminine mind with awe. Rowena was enraptured with this work: she looked very pretty over her frame, though she did not get beyond a grape or two, a vine leaf, and half an ear of wheat; while I abominated the affair entirely and helped her none. Lady Barres had collected the engraved portraits of statesmen, authors, and churchmen who had belonged to families of rank; and these she offered me for copying in pencil. When informed that I could not draw, she despaired forthwith, until informed by Rowena that I was so stupid as to only *care for books.* Books then were gathered together

from different libraries until they made a formidable heap; but Lady Barres, knowing the names of none I wished to read, had only sent for those she fancied herself to have read: though she never read anything at all, as far as I could perceive. Suddenly I bethought myself of the British Museum, and its treasures of manuscript and autograph; these I longed to explore, and requested Lady Barres to permit me to visit the library. She took a morning to consider of this suggestion, and then gave me leave to go, or rather to be taken, upon conditions of her own. So, three or four times a week I was conveyed, in her ladyship's close carriage, with her factotum Burnett on the opposite seat, to the door of the British Museum, and called for again two hours afterwards—being never allowed to stay longer, for fear the lids of my eyes should grow red or my expression become too intellectual.

Burnett was female fag to Lady Barres, and enjoyed the privileges of an aristocratic democrat; she was elderly and imbecile, made first-rate coffee as her salient accomplishment, and drank weak tea as her highest recommendation: she was, however, in the position for which she was fitted, which cannot be said of everybody. While I pored over books and MSS., she used to sit upon a camp-stool, working a coarse sort of counterfeit point-lace, or when she thought I was not looking at her, eating plum-cake *which she brought* in her work-bag.

I never spent happier months than those, but they were necessarily selfish; for I never saw any who suffered, or were poor, except in the streets, and if I had attempted to follow them home Lady Barres would have turned me into the street too. We laid aside our mourning on the 1st of February, and that day Lady Barres drove with us to five-and-twenty different shops, ordering something from each for both of us, as presents from herself; for she was generous with her money, and never cared how it went.

The moment we were left alone with her in our coloured raiment, she began to inform us of the arrangements she had made for our introduction into society. I told her directly that I did not intend to be presented. She never inquired into any person's motives, and therefore did not ask mine, but proceeded so calmly to speak on the subject that I fancied she had not understood me. When I reiterated my determination, she did not even look surprised, but said with perfect sweetness that she was the best judge, and would take care I should be presented: on a favourable occasion too. Not at the same time with Rowena, because we should destroy each other's effect; as, although we both had the Vaux eye, the Vaux vivacity, and the Vaux complexion, which could stand the test of pearls, yet that I, being small, should make Rowena look like a giraffe; while the latter, being of lofty stature, would cause me to *appear insignificant*: which would not do.

I rejected her proposal for the time, and gave my reasons—none worth mentioning except the first, that, not being a Vaux, I would not take a position on false pretences. Whereupon Lady Barres fell silent, and mused for the rest of the morning, shutting herself up in her room.

The evening afterwards, she stole to my side upon the sofa, smiled upon me sweetly, laid her palm upon my hand, and whispered that she would press upon me nothing I did not like, and that I was always to confide in her. The next instant she began to talk about her son, of whom I had never even heard her speak before; and from that time she talked about him continually, until the end of the week, when she announced the fact that he was coming to town to visit her and would arrive the next day.

It had struck me as remarkable that whenever she spoke of him it was in terms which do not usually clothe the feelings of maternal pride. In her dreamiest tones she spoke of him as "poor Barres," "poor fellow," or "my poor dear Horace;"—thus conveying to me the impression that this representative of his race was "afflicted," as plebeians, or "peculiar," as patricians say. I became curious to see the result.

This transpired in due time. On going downstairs to breakfast, I found Lady Barres, who usually breakfasted in her dressing-room, sitting at a table *which looked* ready laid for dinner, so thickly was it

covered with dishes and decanters. She addressed me immediately, kissing me on both my cheeks.

"I am happy to tell you," she said, "that Horace is here: not in this room, you see, for, poor dear fellow, he has gone to wash his hands. He left Bovington at sunrise, and has only been four hours on the road. I tell him he must have ridden too hard—but a gentleman should excel in horsemanship, should not he? No person could find fault with him for coming as fast as possible when he had so much to expect." Then,—in a whisper as of a southern breeze,—"Do you know why he has come, poor dear fellow? Entirely because I described you to him, my child! He declared it must be a flattering description, and has come to judge for himself!"

"How ridiculous!" I exclaimed; for I thought her infinitely so, since she had rallied me on being a beauty in the bud—a *bijou* beauty—"*Mignonne* love, but still a belle; and preferred by highly refined tastes, I assure you, very frequently!"

Had I not been curious to behold this only son of his mother, I should have retreated upon discovering her mood; but, almost while yet she spoke, Lord Barres appeared, filling the height and breadth of the doorway.

This being was of immense proportions, so tall as not to seem stout, and so stout as not to look tall. He had a certain sort of symmetry, too—the sym*metry one may* observe in a very fat baby that has

not a bone to show. His hands, red as roses, had apparently no muscle; there being big dimples in the place where knuckles should be developed, and his wrists were marked by creases in the superabundant flesh. His complexion, originally blond, had yielded to a stress of sunshine, and was profusely freckled; his hay-coloured hair was weather-bleached at the extremities, and a little straggling stubble composed his whiskers. A bland, foolish expression dwelt in his gooseberry-coloured eyes, which would have been actually swinish but for their human insolence, lurking under flaxen lashes.

To describe the minutiæ of his breakfast would sufficiently indicate his idiosyncrasy; but I did not dare to watch him, because the whole time he ate, he was staring at me as though he should very much prefer to eat me rather than what was upon the table. I noticed, however, that he partook of no bread, and that after devouring several kinds of meats, he drank claret and complained of it, then finished with cheese and a liquor he called stingo, which his mamma must have had brewed especially for him, as it never appeared upon the table before or after his visit.

I was glad when Lady Barres arose and carried me off with her to the drawing-room. I walked to the window, trusting that she would forbear to remark upon what I had just seen; however, she slowly *followed me*, and, in her softest accents, said,—

"You must not judge of Horace from what you see this morning; he is fatigued, and a little anxious, perhaps. Anxiety depresses him, as it does me."

"I dare say," I replied: "but I am more astonished at your ladyship than at his lordship."

"Why so, most *piquante* of little persons?"

"That you should allow us to breakfast with your son; and still more, with you refined habits, that you should breakfast with him yourself."

"Ah!" said Lady Barres, caressingly,—"she is not a mother, is she?"

"Had I the honour of being his mother, I would not breakfast with him."

"Ah, that pleases me most of all in you;—your perfect taste and perfect honesty together. And there you and Horace meet;—with all his faults (which are honest ones, and even dear to a mother), he only requires one thing to set them aside and make him really perfect. His temper is a domestic treasure—so persuadable, so easy a disposition. Few gentlemen are easy, let me tell you; they expect so much, and yield so little. Men are selfish generally, my Beatrice!"

"I quite believe that," said I. Certainly, if Lord Barres had an easy temper it was the sole maternal trait he inherited: I never succeeded in ruffling the *surface* of his mother's temper for a single instant.

Perhaps she kept him away in order to enhance the *preciousness of his* presence;—he certainly remained

invisible both at luncheon and at dinner. In the evening, having forgotten him, I went into the drawing-room as usual; again Lady Barres wooed me to the window, and drew up the blind, "that," as she said, "we might see the moon." That orb was bright for London, and occupied me much more than did her remarks; these were, as usual, hints, of which I could make nothing, except that her son only required one thing, and with that addition would be perfect: was, indeed, all but perfect now, though too modest to display that superhuman attribute. Why she should speak to me about her son, puzzled me; but I am not curious except when interested, and she seemed rather satisfied that I did not reply. Presently she said, "I must go and find my other bird," —meaning Rowena; but as it was this bird's habit to let L'Estrange, the maid, practise upon her hair for an hour every evening, and as Lady Barres was aware of these *séances*, I was somewhat surprised to see her really quit the room.

There were stands of forced flowers in every window, and the perfumes of hyacinth and daffodil sent up incense to the moonlight I gazed on; when, feeling I had wasted much of the only hour in the day allowed me to read in peace, I bethought myself to draw down the blind before leaving the window. Before I could do so I was startled by an unctuous tone. Said this elfin voice, "Let me do that for you, I beg"—and *Lord Barres* approached the window.

I have heard that the soft-headed are not soft-footed, and was astonished at the stealth of his advent until I beheld that his lordship wore slippers, which were embroidered with foxes' heads upon a ground of orange colour.

I did not like to be alone with him, but did not choose to leave the room, lest he should imagine I thought about him at all. He lowered the blind with such impetuosity that he broke the cord, retaining the tassel in his hand. Then he followed me to the fire-place, and looking over my head, stared at my reflex in the glass. Find this out in a few moments, I re-treated into a corner, sat down upon a chair, and drew to me the work-frame of Lady Barres. I had scarcely taken up the needle before his lordship turned, pushed a chair before him, by leaning upon its back with his entire weight, and sat down in front of me upon the other side of the frame. Then passed this conversation:—

"How do you do that?"

"I cannot show your lordship—it is a lady's work."

"Men are too awkward: do you think so?"

"Graceful persons are always exceptions,—awkward ones the rule."

"Miss Reynolds, do you think I'm awkward? My mother tells me I am, because I'm not accustomed to *see ladies.* I don't like ladies generally: I can't *make them out.*"

I might have said the same of gentlemen, but was forbidden by his foolish, yet insulting glance.

"Now you know, Miss Reynolds, I mean to make you out. I think I have already, but it's not for me to say so; I am not vain."

"Of course not."

"I always understood that clever ladies were not beautiful."

No answer was required.

"Do you like the country?"

"Very much."

"Would you like to see my place down there?"

"I have seen as much country as I desire."

"You could have new milk, syllabub, and lots of fruit—ladies always like fruit. Don't you feel as if you should like to come? Besides—what ladies think the most of—I've put a very handsome fellow in the pulpit of my church."

"I do not care about such things as your lordship enumerates."

"Do you like horses?"

"Exceedingly."

"You don't mean to tell me you can ride?"

"I have sometimes ridden in the park."

"Then you shall ride all day—I mean as long as you like, you know: I'll give you a mare that will walk upstairs into your bedroom in a morning, and drink out of your chocolate-cup."

"*I should not* like that kind of acquaintance with *a mare.*"

Lord Barres put his hand into his pocket, and produced therefrom a very small pup-terrier, black and glossy, and roly-poly like its master, with a red morocco collar on. This animalcule he put down on the work frame; I shook it off, and it tumbled upon the carpet. With inane deprecation his lordship picked it up and restored it to his pocket, where it forthwith began and continued a hideous whine.

In a moment more his lordship rallied, and walked away to the window: I had hoped he was about to leave the room; but no!—he returned in another instant with a leaf of the scented verbena between his fingers; which, quite suddenly, he presented to my nose. I could have laughed, but restrained myself with scorn; and immediately rising, I rebuked with a glance of indignation his imbecile gaze; his eyes seemed ready to start out of his head. Availing myself of his embarrassment, I pushed the frame against his great stubborn proportions until he was obliged to move, and escaped. But as soon as I was outside the door he tried the handle, so I locked him in, and flew to the dressing-room of Lady Barres. She was lying in a subdued light, upon the softest of sofas, in a long white wrapping gown.

"Ah! Beatrice," she said, holding out her hand, "you have come to me that I may congratulate you! Fie, naughty child! to run away from him so soon! But kiss me now, and let me hear that all is as *I wish.*"

"I don't know what you wish," said I, "but you must be pleased to come down and order your son to let me alone, or I will go to George this very night and tell him how I have been insulted."

I used this threat because I knew it would terrify her exceedingly. George had taken a house as near as possible to the houses of legislature, and Mr. Henry was with him there.

"My sweet child," she replied, "you are naturally fluttered, and very charmingly so; but your *naïveté* misleads you. No young lady considers that the attentions of a nobleman are insulting, however ardently manifested."

"Then, if I may not call them insulting, you must be so good as to tell his lordship that his ardent manifestations are not agreeable to me."

"No, no, Beatrice! I cannot tell him that. He has been too precipitate, poor dear fellow! and has allowed his frankness to prevail. But I am quite sure when you have seen more of him, and understand him better, that you will entirely esteem him: no feeling stronger than esteem should ever be permitted to enter a lady's heart."

"Then you will not order him to desist?"

"Certainly not; it would be to act against your happiness, of which you are not old enough to be the guardian. You forget, Beatrice, what a proof of my affection it is that I wish you to favour my son! *Immediately* I ascertained your dislike to enter

society, my maternal solicitude reminded me of one who has had the same objection from a child. Providence destines you to be his companion; your refinement will polish, and your intellect will enlighten him."

"Am I to meet him to-morrow morning at breakfast?"

"Certainly; and I expect you to behave gracefully, and with indulgence, towards one who deserves such treatment."

I quitted the room, and bade a servant unlock the door of the drawing-room, that Lord Barres might emerge if he pleased; then locking myself into my own room, I sat up reading until dawn, by the light of my lamp. As soon as it was day I put on my cloak and bonnet, crept downstairs, undrew the bolts of the street door myself, and walked to George's house. A servant, who behaved properly, not appearing to notice who I was, showed me into a room filled with books, and a few pictures; among the latter was a portrait of Edward—the face his own, but that of an angel still,—painted from memory by Mr. Henry. In another instant the artist entered. I had expected him, for I knew he always rose with the sun, while my cousin was too delicate to rise very early.

There are some persons to whom one may say a great deal on speculation, though conscious that one incurs the risk of misapprehension: there are a very

few to whom one may say anything, at any time, upon any subject. Mr. Henry was one of these, and I felt no hesitation in asking his advice.

"I can be of no use to you," he said, "for only a relation can interfere in this case; but Lord Ailye shall be told immediately, and will know, I am sure, exactly what to do."

He left me, and remained a long time out of the room; George could never perform a hasty toilette, and when he came down at last, he went out with Mr. Henry. During their absence a woman-servant brought me a charming breakfast, of which I consumed as much as I could, quite two hours before their return. Then George came in alone, looking brilliant with the angry blood that dyed his cheeks.

"I have settled everything!" he exclaimed. "I frightened her well by making a great noise: Henry told me she detests a noise. And *he* is going away this morning,—you are to remain here until she sends me word he has gone. I told her I was your natural protector, and she reminded me of Edward's will; I took care to say to her, 'What would Edward have thought of such a match for Beatrice?'"

"Do tell me what Mr. Henry said."

"Nothing to her, of course; but he walked straight up to Lord Barres, who was sitting by his mother, and entered into conversation with him. He says he's not only a fool, but a wicked fool; a knavish

fool; still *such* a fool that his mother did not know how to dispose of him, and thought to get rid of you and him at once."

I almost feared that at home there might be a crisis, if not a scene. No such thing: Lady Barres, when I returned, escorted by George, received and embraced me as if nothing had happened. The only symptom unusual was her air of extreme exhaustion, causing her to speak in whispers; which lasted several days, and made her even less to be dreaded than usual. In fact, her plan was what might be called a triumphant failure.

It may be mentioned that Lord Barres, after leading a life into which no inquiry should be made, died of delirium tremens at the age of twenty-eight; having for some time previously returned to second childhood. His mother erected a monument to his memory; and for it Chantrey carved a bust, whose features were copied from those of Lady Barres.

CHAPTER VII

Lady Barres was an inveterate matchmaker. Most ladies of lofty rank, and women of less consequence, are so; it is a natural consequence of having daughters to *provide for*, or sons to provide with wives. Nor,

when unmarried daughters are ciphers, and bachelor sons monopolize the attention of every member of a household, can it be wondered at that parents are anxious until reflected dignity is conferred upon the former, or the active well-being of the latter safely shifted upon the shoulders of an obedient wife. Still less is it a matter of suprise, that relations whom one may be unfortunate enough to encumber should desire to get rid of one; albeit with regard to appearances, and in a handsome manner.

The intimate friends of Lady Barres were few, and all were her superiors in rank, if not in fortune: yet she was an universal favourite; perhaps because she seemed to feel for her acquaintance when they were sick or in trouble, while she flattered them when they were well. Her grandest friend, a very remote relation, and the only one she ever consulted, was a dowager duchess; who, though not young, was something of a beauty, rather less of a wit, and if selfish, sublimely so. This lady enjoyed for life the occupation of a magnificent mansion, in a part of town where, though all houses are called mansions, such are really rare.

Rowena was presented by her grace, with tolerable éclat, considering she had no point, though she was pretty. And Lady Barres in vain, with ineffable glances, entreated me to avail myself of an opportunity which was in itself a first-class fate; for the *duchess even* offered to present me: but in her

grace's manner I was made to feel that not only should I be unwontedly criticised, but exposed in helpless presumption, if I rendered myself ridiculous in her eyes by bending in the atmosphere of royalty. I refused, and irate at my refusal, the cause of which she understood, her grace veiled the semblance of irritation by inviting me to her next grand entertainment; an honour I could not have anticipated. She was, of course, confident that I should refuse this invitation, but I accepted it: not to annoy her, only to please myself; for I wished once and only once to enter such a scene.

I can understand how society—that of the great world—exercises over its votaries an influence so powerful as to have passed into a proverb; and can even excuse many who wilfully incur the utmost reaction of conventional excitement. For those whose homes are unhappy, or whose hearts have found no home, are driven to seek relief, if they can find no solace, in that masquerade where hearts alone are masked. This necessity is a bitter truth, yet cannot be disguised;—at the same time the heart that is at rest, either in another heart or the great and universal heart of sympathy Divine, sheds a brightness of its own upon those brilliant scenes, which are not only dreams, but lessons—they touch the fancy yet linger by the life.

George was also invited to this ball, and went with us. *He was a delightful companion*; high-spirited

but never heedless, all chivalry yet not officious. Lady Barres was, of course, prouder of accompanying him than of introducing us; she therefore treated *him* with easy indifference, and *us* with polite devotion. Rowena in the vanity of a fresh-fledged high-flyer, would have worn all her mother's diamonds, had she been permitted; as it was, she wore so many jewels that she eclipsed Lady Barres in that respect; for her ladyship understood costume, and never let ornaments clash. I wore no ornament, but a simple wreath and a plain robe; yet I knew that though not a striking apparition, I was as beautiful as I desired to be. I make this confession in perfect sincerity, as I comprehend not why a woman who admires the beauty of other women should not also admire her own.

This ball was imitated from those of Devonshire House, and was more Arabian than Araby itself. Of course I was chosen as partner by the least distinguished of the guests at first: these young sons of England pleased me much; and it is sad, on looking back at them, to find how very few among them have fulfilled what *seemed* their promise.

Having soon danced myself weary—for in those days I had not learned while dancing *not* to dance—I retired to the central apartment of the circular suite, each room of which seemed to float in a different coloured light; such was the artistic brilliance of *the decorations*. A dome swelled above my head

where stars seemed to sparkle upon a violet ground, and the margin of the cupola was gemmed with purple lamps; indeed, to one who knew not how the effect was managed, its cause seemed magical. In the centre of the dome hung a large white lamp, which poured down a pearly radiance upon a fountain underneath. This fountain played in perfume, and on approaching it I observed that the porcelain basin was encircled by horns of gilt and silver filigree, each containing a superb bouquet of the rarest flowers. I discovered thas these bouquets were presented by the gentlemen to the ladies between each dance, while those supposed to be faded were removed by attendants in superb liveries, who also replenished the horns, as fast as they were emptied, with fresh flowers. Being too new to such arrangements not to marvel at this luxurious profusion, I was wondering what kind of conservatories her grace must maintain in town, or rifle in the country, when George approached me, and scattered my speculations.

"How have you been?" he inquired, seating himself beside me.

"Enjoying myself," I replied; "and you?"

"I shall begin to enjoy myself now. To tell you the truth, Bice, I came to see you; for had I not heard you intended to come, I should have gone to hear Canning to-night. I have sent Henry to listen for me: he always remembers, to a word. Have *you seen Lord* Mayfair, about whom there has been

a sensation — a light gale sprung up among the ladies?"

"It is difficult to know one lord from another where they are as plentiful as acorns in autumn. What is this one like?"

"I wanted you to see him, because Henry, who knows everybody without seeming anybody, was telling me about him last night. It is peculiar to observe how every person present is worshipping him."

"I should have said no person present was capable of worshipping."

"Except you and I," answered George, laughing. "Henry says I have not escaped the age of exaggerated estimates, so I suppose you have not escaped either. This marquis is adored because, after ruining himself in every respect, and to the uttermost, he has, at the last and lowest spoke of Fortune's wheel, by a sudden twist of that capricious machine, been whirled to the top triumphantly in a twinkling."

"Do spare me those flowers of rhetoric, and tell me what he has been doing."

"You will be able to see, for you have eyes that *can* see; and you may thank Heaven for the same. You must know he has evinced some genius in getting rid, clearly and entirely, of the largest fortune in the country. He has brought with him to-night the woman he is to marry. Henry pronounces her *West-Indian: at least* mulatto; but they dare not

pass her off so, because her credentials from her own country are such as would not bear investigation: however, she is enormously, unutterably rich, and therefore of course to be respected. He somehow dragged her in with him to-night, and has put her out there upon a sofa; from which, I suppose, she will not move, as, besides her outlandish impracticability, she is lame."

"How is he behaving to her, George?"

"He is not behaving to her at all just now, for he is not in the same room. All the ladies are burning incense to him, or sounding his praises in the softest pæans. What *does* make ladies—charming women too—admire rakish men?"

"As difficult a question as where pins go to," I replied. "I believe I am an exception. Let me test myself: where is he?"

"I'll take you—indeed, you must not go without me! Do you think me very assuming?"

Guarded by George, I attracted much notice, for he was most attractive; rare and exquisite was the simplicity which combined with his great personal beauty. We paused first in the least crowded of the rooms, where the marquis was not then to be found, but where the future marchioness might be seen, on show.

She was swart-skinned and bristly-haired, her sturdy frame overlaid with shapeless fat; uncivilized, *uncouth*—a person who should never have been

dressed in anything but black, yet wearing white satin stiff with embroidery of seed-pearl, and decked with diamonds wherever they could be stuck. Nevertheless, if her countenance charmed not, it interested by its look of perfect unconsciousness of the reason why she had been taken there, and why every person stared at her. Indeed, it seemed difficult to decide wherefore she *had* come that night; unless it were to set forth how integrally precious is the masculine personality when endowed with high rank and fortune, even though disencumbered to the utmost of honour, worth, and wisdom. I soon saw this human jewel too, in order to preserve whose setting in society the savage simplicity of this barbarian nymph had been ravished from its natural seclusion.

The Marquis of Mayfair was a very young man, looking old, but not mature: the fatal prematurity not of genius or of sorrow, but of vice, had exaggerated every line of his strait hard forehead into that hieroglyph of retributive justice—reckless despair. There was no beam of youthful ingenuousness in his eye, but soft insatiable vanity lurked under lids whose lashes were blighted by the fever of shameless sin. Ignorant of the world, of men, of the discords or the harmony of humanity, as I then was, yet I read in those eyes, upon that brow, and through the enfeebled movements of that exhausted frame, the traces of iniquity in whose rites the devils are surpassed by the sons of men. It was a sight to make

one weep. Still, not to be too serious, one lesson I learned that night. Hard is it for a man to die with an untarnished but untransmitted name,—harder for a woman to have no "pretty Arthur" to meet her in the courts of heaven; but hardest to own as a child one of those desecrated images of the Creator, in whom vicious tendencies, inherited or instinctive, have developed to self-destruction.

Lord Mayfair seemed looking at no lady in particular—indeed, I should have thought him too far spent to examine anything: but it was evident that every lady looked at him in particular; nor with disfavour in glances, either. While men of easy conscience and dissolute conduct continued to be admired by ladies—many innocent, *all* ignorant—and while women actually allow their admiration of these devotees of dissipation to be perceived in their behaviour, it is scarcely matter of surprise that men are not specially severe upon each other; or that even virtuous men avoid a critical demeanour towards those of their own sex who exercise less habitual restraint than they do themselves.

I had not been ten minutes in the room with Lord Mayfair before he asked to be introduced to me. A light pink hue overspread the calm countenance of Lady Barres when she heard his lordship address the duchess on my behalf: I did not understand the cause of that flush, and fancied I had done something *to offend my* chaperone. Before I knew where I was,

Lord Mayfair was presented to me formally, and I was too timid at the moment to outrage etiquette by refusing his lordship when he immediately requested me to dance. However, I felt that he only so distinguished me—perhaps the only unknown individual present—because I was fresh, inexperienced, and new to the world of beauty.

But I cannot express my horror when face to face with him. It is no chimerical hypothesis which maintains there is an actual and material impression conveyed by moral darkness. Darker than doom,—far darker than the night of death, is the reaction of depravity upon its votaries or its victims; and methinks a fallen angel has fallen not so far as a fallen man. I had been glanced upon with admiration by several that evening, and my heart had warmed beneath their glances—this man gazed upon me with homage, and a bitter loathing seemed to chill my blood.

As soon as the quadrille was over, I rushed in among the ladies, devoutly hoping they would cause him to diffuse his now concentrated attentions. But of those ladies who had grovelled for his lordship's notice, who had displayed their fascinations to attract him, before my insignificant self had been miserable enough to engage his attention, not a single soul came forward to assist me in my distress. Either their jealousy of my personal traits, or envy of the pains he had taken to convince me he appreciated

them, held them one and all aloof; and I discovered, among other revelations that night, that amiability is as rare a virtue among feminine natures as chivalry among men.

I walked to the edge of the fountain, disgusted with every person present, and with myself among them. Lord Mayfair followed me, and, bathing his faded fingers in the perfume, conversed with remarkable condescension: if that can be called conversation where one tongue rattles and the other remains at rest. Of course, his compliments were of that common currency which, like coin of the realm, do not become brighter by passing from hand to hand; and for a specimen take the following:—"Pray smile, that we may catch a glimpse of those pearls, the only ones you wear;" and, when I blushed, indignant, "I like girls to be susceptible."

Now, to such a person, the pride of modesty only seems a natural and flattering awe of his undeserved appreciation. Had I known so much then, I should have forced myself to reply; but my revenge took another form, which perhaps my impulsive youth may justify to society in general.

Amidst the bouquets round the fountain were several white ones, which struck me as sentimental-looking, though I did not observe them particularly: they were designed, as I afterwards learned, for the convenience of gentlemen who happened to be affi*anced to ladies* present at the entertainment. Not a

few besides Lord Mayfair were entitled to such insignia that night—it was what might be called a very marrying season. But though white flowers were held in many a fairer hand, and worn in many a bosom, I was aware that the betrothed of the Marquis of Mayfair was undistinguished by the token of affiance which her position authorised, even if her aspect did not suggest to the fancy.

The Marquis of Mayfair, still looking at me, on a sudden took up a white bouquet. Before I could demonstrate to myself why those snowy myrtle-blossoms and roses did not wither while he grasped their stems, and while yet I wondered how his *fiancée* would accept his offering, his lordship presented it to me! In an instant I was prompted by the decision which I ought to have evinced before: I did not *refuse* the bouquet. But I walked with it very calmly through the rooms. Some of the guests looked surprised, as if I were crazy: I suppose I looked as I felt—very highly wrought. Lady Barres tried to arrest me with her hand, but I broke her bracelet, and did not stop to pick it up. Of course, all the gentlemen watched me, and many crowded in my path: this pleased me well, as there could not be too many near me. Lord Mayfair followed too; which pleased me most of all. I led him on behind me to a sofa in the corner, where sat his destined bride; then stepping a little backwards, *and waving my left* hand towards his lordship, I

presented the bouquet with my right hand to herself, saying in a very distinct voice: "Madam, the modesty of the Marquis of Mayfair is such that it does not permit his lordship to avail himself of the privileges of his position. I have been commissioned by him to present these flowers in his name, and to express his conviction of his unworthiness to approach you—a conviction which induced him to offer this slight homage in the person of your very humble servant."

She took the flowers, smiled upon me, and smelled them; but before I could turn round, the Marquis of Mayfair had vanished.

I awoke next morning and found myself fashionable. For this I cared not the least: I merely despised my kind awhile, and felt my self-respect increase.

However, that morning a variety of cards were left at our house, and Lady Barres had a surfeit of callers, who entranced her soul by succeeding each other until the very moment of dinner. She was in such ecstacy, that she even forgave me for not coming down-stairs to see anybody who did me the honour to inquire after me. Perhaps, also, she was afraid I might "tamper with Providence" (as she profanely characterized everything she contrived to bring about) if I were present to contradict the assertions or suppositions of her visitors; which, for my sake, *she* did *not contradict*, though she dared not confirm them

positively. Of course, it was assumed by those to whom I had not been introduced by name, that I was at least of equal rank with him whom I had exposed; and when the name of Reynolds revealed the fact that I had no rank at all, I was conjectured to be immeasurably rich; as rich as the woman Lord Mayfair was going to marry. This last impression endured some time, and it was long before I found out that it had originated in the circumstance of Lady Barres not denying that I was dowered.

She merely blamed me blandly, when we were left alone together, for not seeing the visitors, and not "playing my cards well" the night before. "You know," she said, in her bland, tormenting tones, "that it was the most utter chance in the world which prevented your being blackballed. Had not Lord Mayfair (with natural reserve towards one so greatly his inferior in breeding) a *little* too obviously neglected his *fiancée*, this *escapade* would have been terrible: monstrous ill taste in you, Beatrice. Even now it is my duty to tell you, most trying little person that you are, such an indiscretion will only pass at the first blush of your first season."

"I do not wish your ladyship to defend me," I replied. "'A little too obviously neglected,' indeed! I can assure you that, if I did not perceive she *must* be fitted for him in some respects, or else she would have spurned him with the contempt which an honest *fish-woman would* feel—I say, if I did not see this, I

would go to her and persuade her to disappoint him, even now."

"Really, Beatrice, you must be locked up with your books till you are tame. Your underbred excitability exhausts me; and, though I bear your eccentricity for poor dear Edward's sake, it is my duty not to expose others to it."

"Poor dear Edward, indeed! what would *he* have said, Lady Barres, to my Lord Mayfair?"

"Ah! Beatrice, he was too good for this world: and you know it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven."

"From what George tells me, then, Lord Mayfair is nearer heaven than I fancied, for he is as poor as a poor-box emptied of its last mite."

"Beatrice, you are profane. With your religious education——"

"Madam, do you not profane, then, the words of Truth by quoting them in honour of *that* rich man, as you call him? As for poor Edward, I acknowledge he was good; but had he been better he would not have feared to enter the world. He would then have seen that, hard as it is for the rich to get to Heaven, it is also hard for the poor: their temptations are greater, and they suffer more on earth."

"Why, Beatrice, you are a little democrat! worse than Lord Ailye, and that outlandish friend of his. Really, at your age, it is most decidedly your duty *to consult me.* Edward would have told you that."

"As for my eccentricity, it shall never again annoy your ladyship: I do not find that fashionable society agrees with me, nor I with it. As for my democracy, you know the name of Reynolds stamps me plebeian, and as my inaptitude stands confessed—I cannot help it."

I hoped, after this, her ladyship would give me up; but there were still a few trials of strength between us.

The Marquis of Mayfair married his sable heiress about a month afterwards. At the end of two years they were so very uncomfortable together, that they wished to separate; but he had spent so much of her money that they could not pay for a divorce. She died from those effects of extreme civilisation called "a broken heart:" and his lordship went to Paris, where as much as was left of him was, one day, discovered behind the *grille* of the Morgue, by a dark-souled colleague.

CHAPTER VIII.

One Sunday morning that Lent, Lady Barres issued forth from her dressing-room with an air of anticipation, *holding in her* hand a folded paper.

"*I am not strong* enough to go to church this

morning," she said to me, "and I very much regret it, for here is a note from Lady Smirke to tell me her nephew Mr. Page is going to preach at St. J * * * *'s Church."

Who had not, in those particular days, heard of the Reverend Paston Page? He was the idol of the great religious world; and if his humbler brethren did not look up to him, their non-appreciation was attributed to that envy which holds, alas! even among certain of the priesthood. However, it was certain he was generally popular; and, in those days, celebrity was not so easily attainable as it has become since the opening of the Crystal Palace.

The Reverend Paston Page was peculiarly gifted both by grace and nature. I had heard of his success at the university, of his wonderful dramatic talents, which he had consecrated to the service of the Church, and of his remarkable beauty of person; which had assumed an almost sacred aspect since he had entered upon the duties of his profession. But I had never heard him preach yet.

"You must go and hear him for me, Beatrice," Lady Barres went on; "I know you like clergymen."

Lady Barres always took it for granted, when she asked you to do anything, that you would particularly like to do it, whether you had ever expressed an opinion upon the subject or not. Thus she avoided *the appearance* of selfishness, however clearly she *betrayed the reality* of that prevailing peccadillo.

was, however, curious to see and hear the gentleman in question, because he was said to have great power over persons of my own sex, and to influence them with almost magical effect.

I said I would certainly go. "Then," added her ladyship, "you must bring me the text, and heads of the sermon; for you have such a fine memory, Beatrice. Savage shall fee the pew-opener, and get you a good seat, for the church will of course be crowded; and though Lady Blarney will not be there this windy day, I would not have you take one of her seats uninvited."

Savage was a towering footman with straw-coloured eyelashes; much prized by Lady Barres because he never mispronounced a name, and enunciated each with an expression exactly proportioned to the rank of its possessor. The names of commoners he uttered beneath his breath as though he were ashamed; while he elocutionized a ducal style with such sonorous declamation, that the lustres in the drawing-room vibrated. I detested Savage, and he hated me for my name of Reynolds, and always contrived, when he mentioned it, to convey by his tone and manner an association of some mean lodging over a shop in a low neighbourhood.

On coming downstairs dressed for church I found that Rowena had determined to go also; though, as she never made up her mind at the right time, she *was not dressed*, and I had to wait. Lady Barres

hint about the seat had been founded upon the fact of her not worshipping at St. J****'s Church, but at a smaller and more exclusive shrine, where there was no fuss, and no smells, and where only the great knelt beside the royalty.

The church was crowded; being late, we could scarcely get inside the door, and at first not a foot beyond it, for matrons and maidens of every age, size, and grade, thronged the aisles to suffocation. Some sat on chairs or stools, but many stood; though, strange to say, the pews were anything but full. Many of the pews held a solitary plume (my girlhood was in the reign of feathers); others contained only two or three persons, intrenched in comfort, and undisturbed by the discomfort of those who had no seats, and to whom none were offered.

The heat and press would soon have sent me back into the street, had I not discerned George with Mr. Henry, immediately under the pulpit. I knew George would come to our rescue, and he did; for, taking plenty of time, say several minutes, to get down the aisle, he reached us, and contrived by the same slow stages to conduct us to the place he had occupied at first.

I sat upon the steps of the reading-desk awhile, but on my standing up for a moment to let the reader pass me, other ladies politely glided into my place *and engrossed* all the room, quite up to the reading-*desk door.* George and I both kept our prayer-books

in our pockets, but Rowena, who had brought with her one of those we had been accustomed to use at Ashleigh, with the coronet upon the cover, carried hers in her hand and held it before her eyes. She had not so displayed it a minute, I am sure, before a gentleman, who had a long pew entirely to himself, opened the door and beckoned her in, with a bow that expressed adoration of aristocracy. She honoured him, of course, by entering; but he did not know we belonged to her, and did not offer either of us a seat, so we remained standing outside the door.

The Reverend Paston Page had one of those figures which are described as being above the middle height, but perfectly symmetrical—proportions admired so much by small men of delicate frame, who would be glad to change places with such heroes; not knowing how much more agreeable they themselves are than those tall handsome persons. As the preacher swept up the pulpit steps, there was perfume as of incense, and a rustle through the church; but when his voice was audible, in its first subdued tones, you might have heard a pin fall. His hair was arranged according to approved poetic models, over one of those retreating foreheads which are called classical, but which are merely Romanesque. His complexion was brilliant, and his eyes were that garish blue which attracts without arresting: they were vain eyes, that could *weep at will,* and do great effect with tears. His

voice was sonorous without depth, and loud without tone; his elocution was studied and professional; his oratory was rhetorical, and overmastered suspicion of his orthodoxy: in short, he supplied his hearers with that kind of amusement which, if blent with instruction, is—despite the proverb—generally found to predominate over the latter. The sermon he preached was too little like the model for all sermons; a model which but few, in these latter days, approach. Its application—a corybantic appeal on behalf of a fashionable charity—did not come home to me; for the style of his discourse too strongly reminded me of other fashionable modes of raising funds and replenishing treasuries. It struck me as most probable that Mr. Page would have excited and impressed his audience quite as much from the stage or the rostrum, as from the pulpit.

After service, George whispered to me that he should escort us home. It was not easy to get out of church, for the ladies all lingered to see the last of the preacher, and in due course the gentlemen had to wait for them. The phenomenon presented by the emptying of a very aristocratic temple after morning service—for afternoon is null—I had not beheld before, as I usually attended the chapel of one of the inns of court with George, where preached a priest whose earnest discourses taught and consoled me. Thus, it was a new impression which I received *of the pow*dered footmen, drawn up in parti-coloured

phalanx just outside the church, insolently grimacing among themselves, and who stalked forth from their ranks as the heads of their houses appeared in the porch, and with preternatural solemnity approached to take the books and bear them to the carriages beyond the gates.

We got out as fast as we could, that is after a very long time, and Mr. Henry then departed, leaving us with George. However, we did not escape even then, for Lady Smirke—the person I most dreaded, as she always asked you to dinner on Sunday, because she was that day duller than any other days—was lying in wait in her carriage by the side of the footway, and saw us directly. She stretched her hand out of the window, and when, in reply to her offer to carry us home, I suggested we had not fifty yards to walk, she went on, "Oh, I don't mean to your home—to mine; and come you must and shall. I have great pleasure in saying that my nephew will join us, and I *must* introduce him to my two young friends."

I should have refused, but George accepted the invitation—men are always curious about one another,—and before we could get into the carriage, Mr. Page appeared, minus the canonicals, and assisted us up the step, while George and he followed. All the way home he put his hand to his forehead, stroked back his curls, gave his cravat a delicate twist, or *sighed, as if too* exhausted to speak; while we, who

knew Lady Smirke hated talking in a carriage because of the noise, held our tongues too. Her ladyship lived at Kensington, so we had a long drive, during which Mr. Page disturbed me by staring at me very decidedly, all the while he paid himself the little attentions I have described. When we reached the house there was luncheon, and Mr. Page, after swallowing an egg which his aunt broke for him into a china cup, drank a great many glasses of wine, and ate an ordinary dinner. After luncheon I hoped that we should be permitted to retire, but Mr. Page announced his wish to attend the afternoon service at the Temple church, and took it for granted that the ladies would like to accompany him. Rowena went, and George of course with her, but I refused, and had the pain of discovering, as Mr. Page sulkily strode after his companions, that a clergyman of high family can look cross.

When the carriage returned with the party, Mr. Page looked cross still, but though he expressed intense disappointment at the choral service, and brotherly contempt for the sermon he had heard, he grew amiable as dinner advanced, and ate as one half-starved, imploring every person to do the same.

When we went into the drawing-room I found that it was too late to go to church again, and too early for the prayers which, in compliment to her nephew, Lady Smirke was accustomed to have con-

ducted by him when he was there. Her ladyship being established upon a sofa, and her nephew, as I believed, also seated by her side, Rowena being asleep on another sofa, and George out of the room, I retreated to the remotest corner, and carrying a lamp there, began to read. In a few minutes I was disturbed, though I ought not so to express my sensations, by the voice of Mr. Page.

"I do not know whether I shall be pardoned if I presume upon my office to say a few words to Miss Reynolds."

The word "office" was ominous; but I bowed, and he went on, looking down upon me with singular benignity, considering the short term of our acquaintanceship.

"I observed—forgive me," he said, with extreme tenderness of manner, evidently afraid to wound my feelings; "that you do not use a prayer-book in the service of our church. It is not for me to object on conventional grounds, the grounds of the respect which is due to my office; but I would remind one whose example is of the greatest consequence, that she may injure the cause of religion by even an apparent inconsistency. Do you not belong to the Church of England—the purest and the safest, indeed the only church?"

"It is highly respectable, and I suppose that implies the purity and safety of its members," I *replied.*

"I did not expect to hear light words from your lips."

"My meaning is not light," I answered, "but I have been used to a country congregation, and was not prepared to see people behave in church as they would do at the opera, instead of merging rank and caste in the reflection that all who live need to pray, and pray alike."

"I forgive you," he said solemnly, as though he were the church impersonate. "Then it was not because you object to the service that you held no book?"

"I love that service dearly—it is almost divine; but I prefer listening, to following it in a book."

"But such an example as yours—to the poor—to the rich who are inattentive—"

"There were not many poor to profit by my example. And nobody ought to look about in church: if they did not they would not see their neighbours' behaviour."

"They *ought* not, but alas! they do. They even look at the preacher, when they should be applying his words inwardly: it is his greatest trial and temptation."

I smiled, and covered my eyes with my book. Perhaps he thought that I was "applying his words inwardly:" at all events he said no more then.

George had come up to me to say good-night: he *was going* home. Lady Smirke made us stay to

sleep at her house; because it rained, as she pretended, but in reality because she hated getting out her carriage for any person except herself. George promised to let Lady Barres know, and that we should be sent for early next day. Rowena and I had separate rooms, immense regions of dreariness, worthy of the flats of Kensington. Rowena was allowed to go to bed, but Lady Smirke kept me up long after her nephew had conducted prayers, and I was obliged to endure his presence; which was not agreeable, as he had, during family service, pointedly preached at me and prayed for me! He dilated upon example, responsibility and privileges; looking at me even while he knelt.

Lady Smirke was a vulgar woman, with an unknown ancestry; she had a considerable fortune, and had married into a poor high family, and her strong point was money. She considered it a good thing that her lord liked continental society, although the gratification of his foreign tastes involved frequent separation; as she thought gaming quite right and rational in Paris, though wicked and foolish in London. She did not play herself, but some people said she got tipsy now and then. I know that she had a very high colour; and, though she set up for being very religious, she would sometimes throw a lamp, an inkstand, or a poker at her men-servants, and never *got a maid to stay* with her more than a month. She *had never seen* me until I gave away Lord Mayfair's

bouquet at the ball, and afterwards she had loaded me with attentions up to the present moment. I was not, of course, aware that she was one of those whom Lady Barres had failed to undeceive about my possessing a fortune; and, therefore I was ignorant of her drift when she asked me how long it was since my papa's death, how soon I should be of age, and whether I did not feel being "screwed a little," as all young ladies in my situation must be, until one-and-twenty. At last I yawned so fearfully that she let me go to bed, and the next morning I awoke with the disagreeable impression that Mr. Page was yet under the same roof.

He haunted me at breakfast, and took away my appetite. We had prayers afterwards, at which all the household assembled to hear about examples—the privileges of the rich in setting, and of the poor in following them. I lingered about upon the staircase, hoping Lady Barres would send for us; but as Mr. Page came out upon the landing, and the men in the hall saw him look down at me, I shut myself into the room Lady Smirke called a library, where there were two small chiffonieres filled with books, one with religious classics, and the other with all the Waverley novels and Dr. Johnson's works. I had taken up a life of Wesley and opened it upon the ghost-story, when Mr. Page entered; he pretended to start back, yet after all advanced and came and *bent over me again.* A few slight coughs succeeded,

and then he put—or rather forced—into my hand a very magnificent book bound in red velvet with gilt clasps and edges, having a little plate on the outside which had no name on it as yet.

"What is this?" I inquired: he made no reply. I opened it; it was the Book of Common Prayer, edited by the Reverend Paston Page, profusely illustrated with engravings from pictures by the old masters, with little bits of abbeys and cathedrals woven into the initial letters; very pretty and very ornate: but it frightened me, for I guessed it was a present. "I am very much obliged to you," I said, "but I have a prayer-book, and will not deprive you of this one."

"You *must* — you *will* keep it!" he urged, laying his hand upon mine as it held the book. "I have endeavoured to adapt its appearance to your own — your artistic taste, your position — your"—

"I do not quite understand this," I replied. "I never receive presents except from my relations: I do not think it expedient."

"I can imagine that one with your delicacy of sentiment would object, in most cases; and I admire such a decision on your part: it is not usual with those who are richly endowed by Providence — they want more the more they have. I will believe, despite the thoughtlessness of youth and *beauty, that* you are under a divine impulse

you would consecrate your gifts to him who bestowed them."

"I am entirely at a loss to comprehend your meaning; you will perhaps explain it."

"If you will give me leave to do so; but where so deep an interest is felt it is not easy—particularly when, entirely free from secondary motives—others might misconstrue. Excuse me, sweet young lady, lily of the Lord's garden!—you are very rich."

"Oh, it is quite clear to me that there has been a mistake, and I hasten to correct it! I have no fortune: scarcely enough to live on, if I lived alone; and had it not been for my cousin, the late Lord Ailye's kindness, I might have been compelled even to work for bread."

"Impossible, impossible!" he faltered; and pushed away his chair. In a constrained and haughty voice he added, after a pause during which I resumed my reading again, "I hope that book will be of use to you," meaning not the book I read, but the one he had bestowed. I took up the latter, clasped it, and returned it to his hand with a bow.

"I never receive presents," I said, "as I had the pleasure of telling you. This will perhaps serve your purpose when you find the person you are seeking, for whom you mistook me."

I fancy he found her soon, for I met him walking *with a lady a few* months afterwards; a lady whose

plain face and velvet bonnet, dowdy air and handsome dress, assured me that she was rich : rich enough to satisfy the Reverend Paston Page, it was of course impossible for her, or any one else, to be.

CHAPTER IX.

In these days, when ladies sit with their backs to the horses fronting gentlemen, and gentlemen smoke cigars in private carriages with ladies—as may be seen by any unbeliever on the road to the heights of Sydenham—it is refreshing to invoke Mnemosyne in the person of what in very modern history is called a gentleman of the old school.

Although it was seldom I accompanied Lady Barres when she took Rowena into public, I was of course obliged to dine with her guests, when she had any It was at her first dinner that season I met the Earl of Normanville, a gallant and chivalrous soldier, who had distinguished himself in the European struggle then lately ended, and had returned from Waterloo with every honour but a wound. Since the peace he had succeeded his father, written an autobiography of military experience, acquired *influence in* the senate as one who whipped w

lively speeches upon dreary questions, and received much attention from ladies on account of his tragical domestic fate; for he had married, and lost his countess at the same time with his heir.

He certainly was a combination of the characteristics which charm in refined society; his person was soldierly and grand, with fierce blue eyes, but a very gentle manner; he was not only very intelligent, but well informed on a great variety of subjects, and his faith was orthodox; he talked sensibly, and sometimes so as to fascinate even me. He was most deferential and delicate, yet easy, in his deportment towards our sex; and as I recall his chivalrous devotion, the vision of the past is fairer than the impression of the present. *Then* gentlemen loved to wait on ladies, even when uninfluenced by personal preference: woman was worshipful in their eyes. *Then* they really felt pleasure in performing those little offices which invest society with sentiment, and they actually esteemed it a privilege to anticipate the wants of women. In these days propriety—for true politeness is apocryphal as the Dodo,—is beaten into boys by dancing-masters, to be dragged out of them—not by men—but, strange truth! by *women;* who have actually learned to adapt themselves to the altered manners of the masculine sex. There are bright exceptions, but in this instance, as in too many others, the exceptions prove the rule.

However, to the point. Lord Normanville was

the first gentleman whose conversation pleased me, amongst Lady Barres' friends; and he was also the only person she did not like me to talk to. I could not make this out; as he had been pleased to notice me, and had amused me very much during dinner and afterwards in the drawing-room. I thought my chaperone would have been gratified at my good fortune; but she looked at me as though she wished I were in heaven—or at least in bed. She had an assembly, however, that night, and thus it happened that she could not devote herself so entirely to Lord Normanville as to draw him away from my side. For my part, I felt quite sure that his lordship only talked to me because I was acquainted with the literature of several languages, and had a liking for Spanish, which he delighted in. He recited to me some of the poetry in that tongue, which only an accomplished traveller could make his own; and I talked to him in that fearless fashion, which an earnest, innocent girl of eighteen naturally adopts towards one who has grey hair, even if that hair crowns a perfectly handsome countenance. But Lady Barres did not rally me about Lord Normanville, as she had done about others who had scarcely noticed me.

Next day his lordship called, but only saw Lady Barres. The next day I again heard his persuasive voice, as I was passing the drawing-room door. About an hour afterwards I went into the drawing-

room, and found no person there; but a heap of new Spanish books lay upon the table. While I was turning them over, Lady Barres came in, and told me Lord Normanville had brought them for her to read, as she had told him she was very fond of Spanish.

I quite forgot to mention that Lord Normanville had a half-brother, a member of parliament for a borough, whom he had brought with him to dinner. Lady Barres had talked about this half-brother, and told us he had a large fortune from his mother, who was his father's second wife. He was a tall young man, with a tailor's block of a figure, the face of a doll, and the feet of a Chinese; and he had flirted to the best of his feeble ability with Rowena; who could flirt with *anybody*, except a man of sense. This acquaintance, also, had a result of its own.

The day after I saw the Spanish books, Lady Barres sat writing, and occasionally looking out of the window. She wrote notes every day, but seldom a letter; this was a letter, and a long one, and it had not gone by post, either: she sent it somewhere by Savage, whom usually she never spared off the staircase; but who was absent this day when, again, Lord Normanville called. Lady Barres sent word he was to be shown into the library; she went there to him, and they were closeted together more than an hour. In the evening her ladyship was *fatigued, drank* coffee in bed, and did not send for

us. I was, therefore, astonished to see her down to breakfast next morning, seeming very well and cheerful.

In the middle of the morning, before calling hours, she sent for me into her own boudoir; a cabinet of dainty upholstery which I had never been permitted to enter. She was lying upon the sofa, and by her, on one of the fragile chairs, sat a woman, who looked as if she would break it down with her weight. I could only think of one of those nurses who are characterised by the lunar period of their ministrations. But Lady Barres introduced me to her as to a very dear old friend; though she was dressed like a bathing-guide on a Sunday evening, and from her greeting I could perceive she was quite innocent of education and refined breeding. I liked her, after five minutes' acquaintance. Her face was literally moist with benevolence; and her hearty, genial good-nature made my heart warm to its centre. She squeezed my hand nearly off, and nodded at me with a knowing frankness that made me feel as though she had seen me in my cradle. Thus, though much surprised, I was not annoyed, when she asked me, with very little ceremony, whether I would come and pay her a visit in the country. A little bird, she remarked, had told her what a sweet young lady I was, and how clever. She would not say that her girls were clever, but her——

Here Lady Barres silenced her with a serene look,

and, waving her hand at me, went on,—"The fact is, my dear Beatrice, I had prepared for you this little pleasant surprise. Your looks have pained me, love, lately: you have grown so pale. A little country air —a little repose—and the acquaintance of a charming family of dear young people—these are my remedies, and those of the physician I have consulted about your health. You will return to me revived and braced, and fit for London life, at the height of the season. I did wrong to keep you here last autumn in your mourning; but now there is nothing to prevent your visiting and making friends of your own. You must not, however, monopolise her too long, my dear Mrs. Thynne."

I was thunderstruck; but lightning comes with thunder, and I felt an idea flash upon me that Lady Barres wanted me out of the way. For an instant I thought of Edward, who in his most puritanic moods had made me feel that he cherished me. I remembered more dimly that father who had kept me as the apple of his eye. These reminiscences I crushed down to the very bottom of my heart, and was about to speak, but Lady Barres went on:—"And as for your bouquet of rosebuds"—this flower of expression I presumed, meant the daughters who were not clever—"my little blue sock here will contrast with them very prettily." It struck me that this was an imperfect figure of speech; however, it did not signify to her ladyship's intimate friend, who herself spoke

imperfect grammar. But she was perfect in sincerity; and I knew, therefore, that it *was* her wish, when she expressed it, that I should visit her, and even go with her that morning, when she returned to her house at Richmond.

I had many times that March longed to hear the wind in another key than that in which it howls among London chimneys, and as I have always retained the fancy to gather my own flowers, though Richmond was not quite "the country," it was an agreeable change to me. Anticipating my dislike of the process of packing, Lady Barres, with her wonted amiable placidity, told me to go as I was, and that she would send my wardrobe next day. I bade adieu to Rowena, who was, as usual, having dresses fitted; and as she kissed me I perceived that she also was glad to get rid of me.

In the carriage—a large old-fashioned family coach—the good gossip made me very comfortable, though she chattered all the way. She was one of those persons—always either most excellent or utterly worthless—to whom secrets are as sand to a sieve. Excellent, however, I found her; and most amusing was her story, as far as I heard it.

"You see, my dear," she said, "I felt for you, knowing the position you were in, and hearing through my lady that she had you on hand, and that you were so particular about gentlemen, and *were in the way of* the other,—the tall one with the

other name. Now that Miss Vaux"—meaning, as I gathered, Rowena—" she's a slender slip of a thing they call pretty, but not after my taste. Them eyes that never look you in the face I never took to—bold as the brassiest that stare behind them, *I* say they are. Give me eyes that look full even while they're blushing,—the cheeks I mean. So—where was I ?—oh! when my Lady Barres wrote me, and sent it by the footman, I turned all over; for I thought of course she was dead or dying, and worrying about the trifle I lent her when she went to the new square at the West End,—the price of them houses and the little they pay, in the way of show I mean.—Where was I? Oh! about her writing to me. I saw it was a lilac seal, and that eased me; but when I opened it, it was a good while before I could make out what she wanted. I thought it was a modest way of putting—more money; and she should have had it, sweet pretty creature, for her ladyship can't keep her affairs straight: downright fashionables, as they tell me, never do. But, la! my dear, when I read about you, and how you turned the gentlemen's heads with your bright eyes and your sharp tongue; and how you didn't care about money or looks, but only for your books; and how pale you got sitting over them in that smoky house, I says to Doll, my eldest girl, says I, 'I'll go and see my lady, and ask her if she'll let that little *thing come* and stop with us a bit—for we make

everybody comfortable, I will say, down to the cat.' And Dull and all of them said, 'Oh do fetch her, for she'll bring all the fashions.' Very natural they should think of that,—for, my dear, though innocent as the babe, I'm sure I was when I married, it was me pulled down the girls: though they've had the best of educations, girls never get over what their mother is. You see, my dear, my poor creature"—I found she always recalled her husband so—"my poor creature married me in consequence of the law-suit that, after all, ended in favour of his cousin,—a right-down regular scamp he, and now he my-lords it. I hear he lent the government money in the late Mr. Pitt's time, and they couldn't pay him back, so they were obliged to give him a title. And I'm not sorry *his* son shuts out *my* son, for them peers they never seem to me to have much fun,—I mean those that set in Parliament,—for they're obliged to be in town the stifling part of the year, and they can't even wear their crowns whenever they please, except on their coaches. Where was I before that?—oh! my poor creature, he was brought up with great expectations,—Eton expenses and the college where the young peers go,—and he never got into debt neither; but after the lawsuit, staggered out of court, and wandered about in the city,—no place for him,—when, by the leadings of Providence, it seems to me, he sets down on our door-step and there faints away. *Father was in the* shop, and the shop-boy, who was

putting up the shutters, runs in and tells him a fine gentleman is dropped down dead. Father brought him in, thinking him dead as sure as he was alive, and he calls out to me for warm wine; but I never waited to warm it,—I forces cold brandy (if you can call brandy ever cold) down his throat, and he come to. I remember how I watched him, and nursed him, and wouldn't let him feed himself with his white hands; but I never once thought of such a thing as marrying the like of him, no more than the king, God bless him! It was funny enough that father had talked of retiring to Holloway a good bit,—for he made mints of money, honestly, during the war—the beginning of the war I mean—by fitting out the ships with provisions. He kept on in the old house longer than he would have, because of me. I liked the city, and I do now; but the air is bad for girls, and, besides, if I took them to the city, they'd want to live west, and that would be ruining their prospects, situated as I am, for nobody would visit me. But I was saying about my poor creature. He laid open his whole mind to me, and when he told me he hadn't a pound to begin life with over again, I tried to put him up to proposing, by sitting alone in the room with him and showing him by my manners I would be glad to serve him. And if he had not proposed, I would have proposed to him; for I knew I could make him comfortable, and he was no more fit to work for his living than I am fit to sit on the throne.

Poor father was very pleased I should marry a gentleman, and left everything to him as much as me, heartily. And when father died I told my poor creature he should build a house after his fancy; and he chose by the river up Richmond way, and there all the children were born. People was just getting to notice them as a fine family when they had to go into mourning, and me too, my dear! And, my dear, I hope you'll not think me remiss towards his memory that I don't wear my weeds now, and even gave up silk; but I was afraid of making the girls dull; and Thynne, that's my son, is what people of edication call genius, and it depressed him to see me in black, —so you'll excuse it."

I could, indeed, and anything else from so cordial a companion. At last we stopped at the gates of her very pretty house, with its gardens sloping to the river, swans queening it upon the stream, and peacocks upon the shore; its large greenhouse and brilliant beds of flowers and, what pleased me most of all, the pleasure boat moored close to the lawn among the sedge and leaves of water-lilies. A party of fine-looking young women ran out, less their bonnets, to meet us, and each one in succession imprinted a resolute kiss upon my cheek: then they hugged their mother as though she had been gone a year, and then dragged me into a dining-room, where everything that can be eaten at any meal whatever was arranged upon the table at once. I certainly

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never saw a family who so completely made the most of life's comforts and the least of its cares; with one exception among them: but this melancholy prodigy was at college when I arrived, though expected in a week for the Easter vacation, as a chorus of tongues proclaimed.

That week brought me a delicious store of hygiene. The air suited me, and we were out all day until the early dark set in, riding and driving, or, best of all, boating.

As for the girls, my new companions, it was the pride and boast of their mother that they could each do something, and something different each from each. It charmed her that they should betray their abilities, having herself, as she said, had no more education than the parrot (a large, green one, and the only *dumb* parrot I ever saw—which was accounted an idiot among birds, and which she, therefore, especially protected). However, Dulcibella, the eldest, was very pious and theological, yet not ascetic nor perverse; she corresponded with clergymen, and made cherry-brandy and cranberry-cream, which endangered their constitutions during their pastoral visits. Evelyn, called by her mother Evleen, was accomplished, played and sang, and invariably danced instead of walking. Letitia was an artist, drew likenesses in profile, and took pencil sketches in the grounds. Dorothy was a linguist, could speak French for five minutes straight on, had read Metastasio

with a master, and had heard that German was very difficult. Honoria, the "honey" of her mamma, was a fine fancy needle-woman, and had worked six parrots on six chair-backs for Mrs. Thynne's dressing-room; not from a pattern but from the parrot itself.

These girls, who were all in perfect health and all looked the same age, first taught me practically the doctrine which theory rather excites one to disallow than to believe—that of universal sympathy between human beings and immortal souls. I have never met —certainly never lived in the midst of—so charitable a family. It was the mainspring of their enjoyment that they interested themselves with poverty and sorrow. The girls had plenty of money and spent it freely, but never wasted a penny; they, moreover, would not clothe or feed the idle, but only helped them to get into work: it was the sick and aged, the orphan without a protector, who would have praised their bounty best; only they did not dare.

All this surprised me, as Lady Barres only gave to societies, and not at all in private; she told us that unless your money was placed in such security as societies afford, it could be of no use to anybody: at least so far as you knew yourself the effect of your own peculiar alms. The Thynnes, though they gave away more than any people I have known— except certain Quakers — were, however, dashing dressers, the queens of cockneydom, and gay as poppies in a summer field. I heard soon enough

about their brother; whom they all laughed at, though they seemed to stand in awe of something in him too. His name was Thynne Thynne; his mother having wished to call him after his father, who had not admired his own christian name! His sister informed me that he was a great admirer of ladies, but that he never went too far; that he was frightfully clever, and above all could write poetry—was always writing it; and that the doctors said when he was a baby he had either water on the brain, or genius.

Everybody thinks his own gosling a cygnet, and therefore I was surprised that he turned out rather more of a man, and also more of a poet, than I had expected. He was the only pale one of the family, and had very expressive eyes; still, through all his assumption of ethereal aspirations, I could trace a deep appreciation of being comfortable, which he stifled beneath his sentimental habit. There could be no doubt of his pretensions to genius, with those who have studied the most approved models—the isolated dignity with which, having reached the tea-table, he flung himself into a chair; the start from reverie when his sister handed him his cup; the entranced silence, the fitful remark, the fairy appetite, all marked the "superior being."

The sun went down before we had finished tea, and "the poet" was so shocked at us for talking in the twilight, that he arose and left the room.

It was undoubted that Thynne Thynne was a

poet. Ancient authority assures us that the poet is born, not made; but modern ingenuity has exhibited how those not born poets can be made so. The process, though not difficult, requires confidence, and the tact engendered by reading more books than most persons read; indeed, it is a process actually patented, and at present in full operation. Those who have a natural ear must belong to "a school," own a master, imitate boldly, and plagiarise darkly, under cover of intricate expression; then the work is done. A very clever woman remarked in my hearing, that in these days it is a far more extraordinary merit not to be, than to be an author; since much, very much more is written and published than bought and read. Truly this may be predicated of poets, whose only advantage is, that they "come like shadows—so depart:" or rather like fantastic mushrooms beneath the everlasting oak.

If Thynne Thynne had not been a poet he would have been an agreeable and intelligent young man; for the crumbs fallen from the table of many a great genius had nourished this little genius, so that he knew a good deal. He and I talked much, but we generally quarrelled: still he sought my society; and at last it entered my brain that it would be proper I should talk to him about poetry, as he was a poet. Lady Barres had solemnly advised me that the Reynolds in me prevented my attainment of that highest social art—the art of flattering a foible in

another; and I found, indeed, in the case of Thynne Thynne, that I always contrived to stumble upon the most prosaic subjects. The more I tried to be imaginative, or, as the phrase goes, "ideal" in my conversation, the more inevitably my idiosyncrasy prevailed to preserve my discourse within the limits of that fool's paradise, called nonsense. If Thynne Thynne had been as destitute of breeding as he was of self-knowledge, of course he would have offered to read me his poems; but he was shy and somewhat gentle, and the nearest approach he made to invoking the muse in my presence, was one morning in the boat, when he took a book out of his pocket and offered to read that,—a long poem in blank verse by somebody whom he knew, and the world knew not. Honoria, his youngest sister, snatched the book from him and threw it into the river, so we escaped the imposition, and he the opportunity; which, however, circumstance created for him of itself at last.

I had been there about a fortnight, when one day, on jumping out of the boat, I saw standing at a short distance along the bank a little boy crying: it was one of the gardener's children I knew, and I ran to ask him what was the matter. He pointed to his kite, which had caught among some sedge at the bottom of the bank; and not having been warned that the footing was insecure, I ran down the bank and stretched out my hand to lay hold of the kite. The ground gave way under my foot, and in I fell,

bonnet foremost. There was not water enough to drown, but plenty of mud to stifle me; still I could have got up very well, I believe, even had not Thynne Thynne rushed to my rescue and insisted upon carrying me into the house. I was put to bed after a hot bath, made to drink spiced wine and brandy undiluted, and in fact surfeited with kindness: they wanted me to stay in bed all day. This easy deliverance from a slight danger had, however, developed in me the heroic frame of mind, and I was desirous to thank my preserver.

It was astonishing how intimate we became immediately, and how benign and patronizing his glances grew; nor was this all, for next morning, after breakfast, he so far roused himself from the inertia of reverie, as to ask me whether I would favour him by looking at a picture he had in his room. His sisters exchanged looks, and his mamma nodded at me; it was, in fact, understood through the house that there was to be no sound heard in it until he issued from that room, which was consecrated to him while reading for his degree; but as I was curious, rather than reverential, I consented to accompany him. There was plenty of sacred litter in his room, and heaps of papers on the table; he did not at first draw my attention to these, but took out of a portfolio, in which it had travelled; a horrible likeness of himself, drawn on stone by an aspiring gentleman-commoner who had never learned to draw on

anything. He told me he should have it framed for his mother, and that some day, when he had earned the right to celebrity, he hoped it would be engraved and published. "Do you think ambition a vice, or only a weakness, Miss Reynolds?" he inquired, as he was very slowly putting away the picture: evidently he wished for my serious opinion. Now for it, I thought: I like to tell men what I think when they will listen; which is seldom.

"When ambition accompanies genius," I replied, "I believe it to be the most powerful of virtues; but when a man without genius has ambition, it can scarcely be named either vice or weakness, as it results in negative folly without fruition."

He sighed.

"What a thought is that! How shall it then be decided what genius is?"

"Very unnecessary to decide, as it declares itself without definition."

"Its only painful attribute is that it comes and goes like the wind"—laying his hand upon some papers—"one day the heart glows, and the brain is a paradise of fancies; next day the bosom is as ice, and the head shrouded Olympus-like in cloud!"

The prettiness of the first conceit was merged in the absurdity of the second.

"It would be very undesirable," I remarked, "that the action of the intellect should not be now and then

impeded: it is unwholesome to live without sleep, either physically or morally."

"Ah! but one cannot sleep! there is so much to do."

This observation touched my sympathy: it had often occurred to me. However, I should have remembered that there are things done which were better undone. Seeing him stand there with a certain sensitive expression, I remembered that very likely he had his poems underneath his hand, and said,—

"I have heard that you are a poet: is it allowable to ask whether I may read your poems?"

He started, blushed, and hid his face with his hands. "Never!" it was impossible—I could not read his writing—men at college wrote *such* hands!"

I was considering whether it would be an indiscreet suggestion that he should read them to me; when he saved my prudence: if I did not think it too great a liberty, he would venture to read me one or two of those which had been most admired. I said, perhaps his sisters would also like to hear. He replied, with a melancholy smile,—

"They do not care: they have no taste, no sympathy with *us*."

Did he mean himself and the Olympian Hierarchy, or me and himself? I knew not.

"Don't you mean to publish them?" I asked him. "I have a volume now in the press," he answered;

"but there are rivalries and jealousies, and, I wish to publish at least as a B.A."

I heard from his sisters that there were not enough of his short poems to make a volume of important size; and that the publisher had recommended the poet to produce a long poem, with a majestic title. As Mr. Thynne's poems did ultimately dawdle into print, perhaps they may be met with on some book-stalls, I need not, therefore, introduce specimens of them here.

"The first," said he in preface, "I wrote under very peculiar circumstances. I had been to the hairdresser's, and he had cut off more of my hair than was necessary. I did not discover his mistake at the time, but walking upon the banks of the river when it was perfectly smooth and transparent, I saw that I looked like a ghost: the loss of my hair having unveiled that wan outline which is peculiar to those who study art and care not to preserve health. It was a sultry day, and I threw myself upon the bank; beneath me, in the transparent mirror, I yet beheld those melancholy lineaments. An idea arrested me —Narcissus!—So by the classic fountain he reclined, and pined after his own beauty: a beautiful type of the poet, who finds nothing fairer than his own in-born aspirations."

He read the verses, very slowly, as a clerk gives *out a hymn* at a week-day service; and nothing, *except the Rejected Addresses*, ever made me laugh so

much as this poem—within myself, for outwardly I kept my face.

I thought it a great pity that he should not be laughed out of his hallucination, little suspecting that the mania of the literary hypochondriac is the worst to cure.

That evening I found a bunch of really "rathe" primroses in my plate at the tea-table. I took it up, and placed it in front of my dress. Thynne Thynne was not at table, and I supposed he had gone out to dinner; but presently he returned from some unknown region, and as all his sisters were present, he chased me round the room until he got me into a corner. Then he whispered, unmistakeably indicating the primroses with his eye, "I thank you that you have permitted them to plead for me," and thrust a paper into my hand. Thinking it to be a letter, I half opened it, and saw verses. They seemed scarcely worth a scene, so, without reading, I put them into my work-bag; and it was not until next morning that I bethought myself to see what they were like. I opened them—read them—the first time thinking them absurd, the second time annoying. They must have been mysterious, for on scanning them attentively, I was amazed. Could they possibly imply that some indiscretion had involved me? I felt for the moment as a fly in a spider's web; for I knew Thynne Thynne was serious when most absurd. The *lines were these:*—

"O thou so magically mild,
So soft, so heavenly dear!
Brow'd whitely as the cradle child,
Eyed as the stars we fear,
Veiling with tenderness thy love,
Which else should flash too bright,
(Like the cleft skies roll'd back above)
To blind me with thy light!

"What beauty harp'd, what beauty sung,
For thine sufficeth me?
Then marvel not my faltering tongue
Essayeth praise of thee.
That praise falls not on empty air,
It soothes thine heart to rest,
With promise of a fate more fair,
A being fully blest.

"Through those sweet eyes, so darkly blue,
Despite their fringéd fall,
I catch a glimpse of heaven's own hue,
Thy sympathy, my all.
I bade thee blush—my fervent lays,
Made bloom that rose divine,
Then mix thy lily with my bays,
And let the wreath be mine."

How could such nonsense affect me? Yet it did. I feared having committed some imprudence by which my independence was compromised. Was it possible that mortal maiden could so far involve herself by talking to a man for an hour about his own poetry? How could my feminine intuition have so deserted me? What to do I knew not. Other men had liked me, but this was the first man who had assured me that I liked him, and who therefore condescended to intimate that he liked me. I was desperate; in the glass I saw an ugly white face and pale lips: that

"rose divine" had vanished. How often does the literal aid one when the intellectual fails! In my perplexity I heard a noise of feet outside my door. Somebody knocked, I did not answer, and the footsteps crept away. When I thought them at safe distance I opened my door, and lo! there were all the girls, their fine rosy countenances very grave, and all looking at me. In they all came, uninvited with Dulcibella at their head.

"I told you so," she observed reproachfully to her sisters, "I knew it when I saw him give it her. Never mind, dear!" and she kissed me.

"Never mind!" they all echoed, kissing me too.

"Never mind what?" I asked: "nothing is the matter, what in the world do you all come here for the first thing in the morning?"

"For shame!" said Dulcibella, "how can you treat us so, Beatrice? As if we did not know what he was up to!"

"What a shame;" "lie down on the bed;" "as white as a sheet;" "a drop of lavender on sugar;" and a few other girlisms followed; quite enough to bring back colour to my cheeks — for now they burned.

"I wish, ladies, you would tell me what you have come for," said I once more.

"Because," said Dorothy, "we were so afraid you would be angry with Thynne: we saw you crush the paper up without reading it."

"Without reading what?" I asked pettishly.

"Now, Beatrice," said Dulcibella, very solemnly, "It's of no use talking so. I know you don't care about him: I know too well what those feelings are! But Dolly saw him give you the letter, and we talked it over, and agreed to ask you as a great favour not to tell mamma."

"Tell her? why should I tell anybody? He has written me no letter; only some verses, most absurdly ridiculous, and not worth reading. I shall take no notice of them."

"That's right," said Dulcibella. "I told you, girls, that mamma was wrong: she thinks everybody likes him."

"Likes him, indeed!" said I; "I *did* like him very well; but now I hate him. The idea of his daring to say I 'veiled my love with tenderness.'"

"Why," exclaimed Letitia, "that very line is in the set he wrote in Minnie Reed's album."

"There they are—you had better read them all."

Dulcibella took them, and they all looked over h shoulder. As they went on one and all scream and grew red with indignation.

"Now be quiet, all of you," said Dulcibella, "a let me explain to Beatrice. Thynne is so dreadf susceptible," she went on, "that I don't believe ever will be married: no one ever stops in the h —friends of ours I mean—he does not flirt w poetically you know; but I think that as bad as

Of course you, Beatrice, are just the creature to upset him; but I did not think he would have played such a mean trick for the sake of saving himself trouble. These lines are as old as the hills—first he wrote them for a Valentine before he went to college, and sent them signed with his name to Miss Ramsden, at Hampton; who is killingly pretty, and very proud: she cut him dead next time she saw him, and he declared it was only because he sent the verses as a Valentine, not that she did not like him. And then, as Letty said, he wrote them in Minnie Reed's album. Minnie was fool enough to like him, and was going to write an answer—a letter, not poetry—and I was afraid; for I knew his fancies never lasted more than a week, so I told mamma. Mamma talked to Minnie, and told her that all poets wrote about love, and that no proposals meant anything that were not made in prose. Minnie fretted a good deal, but got over it, and now she has married a clergyman. Mamma didn't care about *her;* but, Beatrice, she is so fond of *you* that she would give anything if you should marry Thynne. We know very well you wouldn't, you know—but, you understand, she would be in such a state if she thought you were offended with him; because of Lady Barres."

"Don't fear I shall tell her: I am only desirous that his folly should be forgotten. Certainly, the verses have done good service."

"*Yes, indeed,*" said Dulcibella; "and he only

altered one line: Miss Ramsden is a gipsy, and he wrote for *her*—"Through those proud eyes so darkly bright," with something about "that dear sight;" but "blue eyes" did for Minnie, though she has flaxen hair."

I was now quite restored: "Pray," said I, however, "do not let your brother know we have conversed upon the subject, he would think himself of so much consequence."

"Oh! no," they all promised; but they expressed surprise that I should go down to breakfast as usual. However, I did, and shook hands with Thynne Thynne, taking no notice of any of his grimaces, and looking him full in the eyes. This treatment succeeded, for though he tried to take opportunities of meeting me alone, he found none, and at last he sank into the utmost composure of commonplace, treated me as a gentleman in society should, and behaved as if nothing had happened. So did I.

CHAPTER X.

I DID not shorten my visit, either. A fortnight passed; and Thynne Thynne had returned to college. I had received no letters either from Lady Barres or Rowena; but one morning, a servant on horseback, in a livery I did not identify, brought a large parcel,

which he said he was to deliver into Miss Reynolds' own hands. I took it from him. He was very respectful, said there was no answer required, and swiftly departed, leaving me much at a loss. I opened the parcel in my room. It contained a valuable Spanish guitar, in a painted case, and a volume of manuscript songs, also Spanish. Still more amazed, I opened the book, and a letter fell out of it, addressed to me in a hand I had never seen. It ran thus :—

"My dear Miss Reynolds,—For the first and last time I address you by letter—bear with me while I say a few words, which I cannot ask *another* to communicate. You did rightly and nobly to deny me a personal interview: I might, perhaps, have distressed you by the burden of a devotion I too painfully concealed, which, at your command, I would conceal from myself. I call you not cold, sweet child; but I honour, respect, and bow to your decision; for few, very few so fair and so young, would have disdained to *receive* the homage of a love they could not reciprocate. Your spirited determination that I should not even plead my cause has but deepened that profound regard which must take the place of passion, and which subdues it for your sake. Fear not, therefore, to return to a house which I trust will be in future more than ever a home to you. No word, nor whisper, not a wayward glance, shall remind you that one who is your most devoted

friend, ever, in distracted moods, dreamed the dream that he might be other and more.

"For soon I shall be placed in a position which I trust will guarantee your peace of mind, and, I pray, may increase your happiness. Your most amiable and accomplished protectress, in accepting my hand, will redouble her energies—I hope, her power—to minister to your comfort and enjoyment. I feel sure that, so affianced, you will give me credit for having made you my first consideration. I trust that you will treat me sincerely, as you find me faithful, and ask me for all you may require: to all your youthful wishes let me minister. In earnest of such sweet confidence—a sweeter than parental care—I send you a guitar; that instrument which is only tuneable in the most graceful hands. Also a few songs, written in my far-distant youth, which I believe are new in England."

This was all, except the signature. The signature!—Normanville. I read the letter over again, very slowly.—Normanville! "A personal interview I had denied." "My spirited determination that he should not plead his cause." "Profound regard which took the place of passion." "Affianced to my protectress." I was baffled by the mystery at every point. A Werteresque confusion seized my faculties; my head swam, and my heart sickened. I was but eighteen, or I should have detected a key to the cipher in the sentence, then to me inscrutable—"A few words I cannot ask *another* to communicate."

I might possibly have felt touched by the first part of the letter, had not the second disgusted me; and as for the conclusion, it goaded me to desperation. I determined—however innocent of the determination he ascribed to me—to risk all in discovering the truth. I, therefore, requested the loan of a carriage of my generous hostess. "Is my Lady Barres ill?" of course, she asked; but I calmed her apprehensions, and, saying I would return to dinner, she let me go: forgiving me very good-naturedly for refusing her escort.

I reached town about three o'clock, and saw Savage, who informed me Lady Barres was out, and had taken Miss Vaux with her. I could not calculate the duration of a round of calls, but resolved to wait as long as possible; whereupon Savage threw open the dining-room door. There was no fire. "No," I said, "I am cold, and will sit in the drawing-room." "The drawing-room is occupied," remarked Savage, looking at me like a were-wolf. I took no notice, but rang the dining-room bell. Up came a maid, with whom I happened to be a favourite. "Who is in the drawing-room?" "My Lord Normanville: his lordship is waiting for my lady." How fortunate, thought I. I will go to head-quarters. Fanny was a modest person, and I ventured to enlighten myself by remarking inquiringly—"Lord Normanville has been here often, of course, since I went away?" "Every day," Fanny replied, adding that she supposed something had

detained him that morning, as her lady had said she could not wait for him any longer.

I went upstairs, feeling more guilty than I was; but not afraid of him. As I entered the room, he turned pale, and caught hold of the mantelshelf, near which he had stood. I went up to him and held out my hand; he took it, and retained it, bending on me his agitated glance. I remarked very quietly that I had come to thank his lordship for a beautiful present, which I valued; and had done so in person, because I unexpectedly heard that he was in the house. His eye flashed, and I thought he smiled inquiringly as I withdrew my hand, and seated myself upon a sofa. He still stood. "Pardon—pardon!" he exclaimed, with a trembling voice, that dissolved my indignation: "I was not prepared to see *you*, and your coming mastered me. An old soldier should not be weak as I am; but it is ever so. Your sudden arrival, your frank address—God grant my sentence be not too late reversed—too late!"

"Your lordship may rest quite assured that I only claim the privilege of your friendship. But I have a prejudice against writing anything that *can* be spoken without fear; and I almost dread, from your letter, that you may consider me ungrateful."

"Ungrateful!—and to me! Spare me, or I shall be driven beyond my resolution to tell you how *grateful am I* for this visit—however painful, still *most sweet.*"

"Not at all—the obligation is on my side. Excuse me, but I am a predetermined old maid, and I like to be precise. I fancy that my sentiments were too rudely conveyed to you. May I ask you exactly what took place between my guardian and your lordship—about myself, I mean?"

"And you do not know—you can bear to hear my painful story?"

"It cannot be painful to me. But it is my very earnest wish to be sure that your lordship has been treated with the respect due to your condescension—your considerateness."

I knew he would go on, if he began, about himself; and I felt I must know, from *him*, as my only guarantee of an authentic detail.

"I came, you know too well," he said, "hoping, longing, praying for an interview with you. Perhaps my generous friend, your guardian, would not have told you how I pleaded my cause, at first to her, of course; requesting her permission to plead it with yourself. It is impossible to express how graciously, affectionately she received me; with what tender and almost maternal kindness she promised to do all in her power to persuade you to permit me an interview. Her disinterested admiration of your beauty, her enthusiastic recognition of your genius and your discretion, interfered with the suggestion of her maturer *judgment*—which, alas! I as well as she *miscalculated.* She led me to hope that the great

disparity of our years would not be in our eyes an invincible objection; for she hinted at your unheeded triumphs amidst men who were young and inexperienced, to whom, as to me, you were irresistible.

"She bade me farewell with touching earnestness—she promised to *pray* for my success—and she appointed an hour next day for me to inquire the result of her mediation.

"I called. She greeted me with a countenance of the truest sympathy—she told sad tidings in the sweetest voice. She said you had resolutely and indignantly refused to see me—that your fastidious taste was deeply offended by my appeal, and that you determined no longer to suffer my hope to exist. 'But,' added her ladyship, with warmth she rarely exhibits, 'my dear Lord Normanville, what is a girl's resolution? It is equally absurd to suppose that the child is devoid of the coquetry which at her age is most natural and fascinating.' Forgive me, Beatrice! there alone I differed from her: your decision was, to my apprehension, doom. But I did not say so: I was a drowning man, and I caught at a wisp of straw."

"Yes," I gasped forth,—"she said"——

"That I might come again next day, and that she was most sanguine in believing you would change your mind between that day and the morrow."

"And the next day," I interrupted, "I guess what

happened!" I said this hastily, lest an item of the truth—or rather the falsehood!—should escape me. Lord Normanville continued:—

"She met me again with smiles and tears, and spoke tenderly of her deep anxiety. She expressed her wish that you were happily settled in life, and said that she preferred me to any one she had seen; but she did not conceal from me that she had a second time, and still more indignantly, been silenced by you when she alluded to me in the most distant manner."

"I fear I gave her a great deal of trouble!"

"*She* did not think so; though her nerves were shattered and trembling under the delicacy of her position. Seeing my despair, she added, that—though most affectionately regardful of your feelings, as she knew well those feelings were not devoted to another—she should employ her authority as your guardian to insist upon your granting me an interview—only one; but still an opportunity which I too rashly desired. I sorely repented me of that extreme measure; which, however, I certainly permitted her to take; and I shall ever regret it."

"You need not," I interposed.

"Alas! next day I came. Lady Barres could not see me for some time, and when, at last, I was admitted, she was lying exhausted upon the sofa. She could scarcely find words to tell me the bitter and distracting truth, that you had fled, she knew

not whither. She had reason to dislike my intrusion at such a time, and for a week afterwards I dared not call, so haughtily had she dismissed me. In a few days I received from her ladyship a letter which overcame me. I cannot trouble *you* with its contents, but they deeply touched my heart, then desolately cold. She said she had heard where you were, but that the family who entertained you were not fit to be your associates. She requested me to call, and we had a long, most deeply trying interview. Her health seemed even dangerously shattered by her affectionate anxieties—her devoted tenderness for one she loves as her own daughter. She bitterly lamented your absence, and very gently reproached me with what I too sincerely felt,—the fatality of a sentiment engendered by the charms of youthful beauty in one whose heart alone is young. She quite made it manifest that you could not be recalled while I visited her as on former grounds—that you *would* not, rather; but she most generously defended your spirit, and she most fondly excepted you from those everyday instances in which the guardian *commands*, not requests.

"The rest you know: but are too young to understand. It was long before your refined and proud protectress would permit me to hope that even remotely I might be suffered to testify to her my gratitude — my sincere regard. Her remarkable character has unfolded a fresh page—rather a fresh

volume—of the mysterious poetry of woman. It would be impossible to find any one so sincere, so devoted to the highest duties, so hard to win, and so exalted when won. I tell you all this to console your generous heart; it could not otherwise be disclosed. But you wished to know all; and in few words I have conveyed to you what has cost days and nights of suspense, of anxious thought, and prayer most ardent. It would be very soothing to me to have your approbation. There are yet three years of your sojourn here,—may they be the happiest of your life!"

"I have no doubt they will. Shall I see my kind friend, Lady Barres, that I may have the gratification of congratulating her?"

"I trust she will return even every moment."

"Then I must vanish. As a great favour, will your lordship refrain from telling her that we have had an interview? It would pain her, and I have given her too much trouble already."

"I will sacredly fulfil your commands. Must I then leave you? command *me*."

"By no means: I want something out of my room, and will remain there until Lady Barres returns."

I went, and sitting there, remembered a theory I had met with in an old book on "The Black Art," that every woman since Eve has been born with a serpent coiled inside her heart; the snake is, in some

cases, scotched by the power of virtue, but in no instance is it found wanting, by the anatomist who goes the right way to find it. In some subjects the reptile evinces the intense suggestiveness of its prototype, and insinuates each canon of deceit, yea, even unto self-deception. Perhaps, therefore, the *cornu ammonis* imbedded in my own hard heart deceived me—perhaps I was disappointed, not disgusted—perhaps it was envy and not contempt that bowed my spirit, and spread along my veins a throbbing fever.

I had not, however, been ten minutes in my room when I heard a knock at the street door, which I knew to be Lady Barres's. Although I had not chosen to stay alone with Lord Normanville, I wished to be found in the drawing-room, and returned there before the servants had opened the door. Having arrived there, Lord Normanville and I both heard a noise upon the stairs, as of sobbing, shuffling, and something being dragged along. We went to the door, and I beheld Rowena, whom Savage and a maid were conveying upstairs; she screaming, struggling, and frantically discomposed. Horrified, I returned into the room: still Lady Barres did not appear. Then I said, "Your lordship has promised to be my friend. If my cousin is so ill, of course Lady Barres is upset, and to see me suddenly might alarm her. Under these circumstances, will you go and tell her I am here, and why

I came—to congratulate her ladyship, having received your letter of information."

He went; which some men would not have done. He remained some little time downstairs; but at length he re-entered, leading Lady Barres by her hand. She wore her bonnet, and an Indian shawl which trailed on the ground; she came forwards, sank upon a sofa, and held out her hands to greet me. She looked soft, pale, and fascinating: her glance was timid and bewildered. She addressed me in a tender tone, "My child, my own sweet Beatrice, welcome! most welcome; and many thanks for your pretty message which was so gallantly conveyed to me. You will excuse my not alluding to circumstances which have been ordained by one who does all well." Here she glanced at Lord Normanville, who looked as if he were at a levée,—can stiff discomfort further go? I tried to pull my hands away, but she imprisoned them in her velvet palms. "And the sun has absolutely left your beautiful skin without a touch. Do you know, my dear Lord Normanville, that it is only complexions of the very purest that never burn." "Nobody burns under a March sun," I observed. "But the winds! those blighting, rasping winds, they absolutely flay one alive. I never dare to put my face out of doors in the country except in August."

I did not suggest the unlikelihood of there being any radical difference between country and London

wind, for Lady Barres could not be supposed to know what she said, under the providential circumstances to which she could not allude. I, therefore, remarked upon the necessity of my departure; but she replied, "I really cannot spare you any longer: I must not lose you again—wild child as you are, to have come alone and unprotected! Does she think I will let such a dangerous little person be any longer at large?" Then she called Savage by ringing the bell, and told him to "send back Mrs. Thynne's carriage, with my compliments, and tell her man to say Miss Reynolds will remain in town." "But I promised to return," I remarked. "No, no!" she answered, with soft, but tigress-like looks and sweet peremptory accents; "it must not be. There is my poor Rowena, so very sadly poorly; so lonely without her sweet companion. You will not refuse to help me by remaining with her while I am of necessity so occupied. She has indeed been ill, and has much exhausted me, for I could not allow any one else to minister to her wants. Will my Beatrice go and see her? She is now in her own room, I fear quite distressingly fatigued by our short drive this afternoon; which has also wearied me."

This long explanation was unnecessary. I did not particularly like being with them in the room, and went immediately to Rowena, who was lying rigid upon her bed with her walking dress on, and her bonnet smashed flat as a trencher. Directly she saw

me her screams were renewed; she first locked her arms tight round my neck, and then pushed me away. The maid, who was standing by with a solemn countenance, but an evident sympathy with the scene, I dismissed very shortly from the room, and then sat down some distance from the bed, with my back to the patient, and took a book. My treatment was successful: Rowena rallied; having nothing real to recover from. Then followed the relation of her wrongs; which, considering her disposition, were worse than mine, though I cannot say they made me more indignant.

It appeared that Lady Barres had intimated to her, even before I was out of the house, that it was necessary to send me away because I thought too much of Lord Normanville's notice, and too little of the difference between myself and a grandee like him. I really did not know, until Rowena told me, of how great worldly advantages Lord Normanville was master. The only intellectual exercise my fair cousin ever perpetrated, was to calculate the actual fortune and pecuniary anticipations of every person she met. Her results were always accurate to a figure; and in the case of Lord Normanville, they had been too tremendous for her peace, and had filled her empty brain with golden visions. I could not ascertain how far Lady Barres was answerable for this her folly; but I certainly gathered that her ladyship assured Rowena Lord Normanville admired

her much, far more than me; that his lordship must be permitted to come to the house whenever he pleased; and that his half-brother must also have this privilege extended to him, and be treated with vast politeness by Rowena, for his lordship's sake. All this was diluted with much pique but little passion, not worth repeating or remembering. But the end of the story was, that Lady Barres had that morning revealed to her two facts—rather an overdose for so feeble a mental constitution—that Lord Normanville was going to marry her ladyship, and had also requested permission for his half-brother to aspire to the hand of Rowena: that horrid Hugh de Brabazone!

In vain, for awhile, I represented to her that in his veins flowed stately Norman blood; that his private fortune was superior to that of any individual she had met, except his brother; and that (as the highest precedent my reading afforded me) Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had married a commoner, though herself the daughter of a ducal house. Rowena did not renew the active demonstrations I dreaded, but she remained in that state of collapse commonly called the sulks. I really desired that she should marry Hugh de Brabazone; for, though a mere dandy, he was even-tempered; and though vain, not vicious; he thought bad morals low. Also, although he esteemed himself in the first place, it was probable he would in the second place esteem his wife; she being part of, and nearest to, himself.

CHAPTER XI.

Rowena and I were of course never allowed to go out except under superintendence; indeed Lady Barres did not permit us to walk at all, except in the park. That I once erred in violating her orders, I can scarcely regret or repent.

It happened one afternoon in the beginning of May, that Lady Barres went out to make purchases in anticipation of an auspicious event, and carried Rowena with her; remarking that I never took any interest in such matters, and she therefore did not pester me to accompany them. This was true about my taste, or tastelessness; but she was glad to be out of my sight at that particular time. I knew they would be a long while in the shops; and Savage, who always watched me, being off duty at his dinner, I obeyed my irresistible inclination to inhale a breath or two of fresh air. The park was only one square and a street and a half off, so I determined to dare the short distance by myself. I wrapped myself in a shawl, eclipsed my countenance with a poke bonnet and veil, and sallied forth with a book in my hand.

Now there had been a levée that day, and there was to be a great horticultural show somewhere at the West End, or near it; carriage-loads of patricians and crowds of plebeians filled the streets; so that I grew bewildered, and, despite my proximity to the park, I lost my way. I was about to cross the road to get out of the throng, and was waiting for a break in the string of equipages, when I saw emerge from a picture-shop, Mr. Henry, with a lady on his arm. This shop was immediately behind me as I stood, and I had been looking in at its window when I saw them. Under any other circumstances I should have ventured to greet him, but the lady so entranced my gaze that at the moment I forgot to address her companion. Underneath her cottage bonnet I had caught one full glimpse of her face, so singularly, ravishingly beautiful, that it prompted the audacious resolution to find out where she was going, and, if possible, who she was. I rushed after them; but it was unnecessary to hurry myself, as they moved with the slow and graceful step so unusual in this country, and rarely to be seen but upon such promenades as that of San Georgia or the Alameda. The lady leaned upon the arm of the gentleman, and every moment turned towards him with the most confiding gestures. They did not cross the road, but turned from one street into another; I recklessly following, though taking care *to tread as* they trod, and very lightly. The figure

of the lady was slender and somewhat tall, but exquisitely graceful. I did not hear her voice, so low she spoke; but I could just distinguish the murmur of his, and that now and then they laughed. At length he left her—yes, left her, at the door of a small private house in a very quiet well-built street. As the door opened to receive her, they shook hands, and he said something to her; but he did not look up at the house as he retired: it was evidently familiar to him. I had staked a good deal upon that probability, of course. He could not then be her lover! It was clear to me, therefore, that she must be either his wife or his sister: his daughter it was impossible for her to be: as I knew that, even if he were privately married, his age, being only thirty at the time I first saw him at Ashleigh, would preclude his having a child grown up.

While he walked away, I stood upon an adjacent door-step, that in case he recognized my figure he might suppose I was going to call upon some one; and I took care to turn my back until he had crossed the road: for I felt I had been guilty of a little act of espionage, innocent as was my curiosity; else why had I not addressed him? I fancied him safe out of sight, when I ventured to look round; but there he was standing on the other side of the street, and evidently watching me, though very gravely. I had drawn my veil close down, and did not think he knew me, but in another instant he had recrossed

the street, and approached; he did not wait for me to bow, but exclaimed, somewhat anxiously, "Miss Reynolds!"

"Mr. Henry!" I replied, and bowed as easily as possible.

"Really," he continued, "I am surprised to see you here."

"Very likely," said I; "I was going to take a walk in the park, or rather to sit down there and read, and I lost my way. Don't let me detain you, Mr. Henry, but I shall really be thankful if you will just set me right in my road. I only want one of the gates, I do not care which."

"They are so remarkably near one another that it does not matter which, certainly," Mr. Henry observed with a smile. "I will bring a hackney-coach to you, and see that you are safely conveyed home," he added, glancing at me with his piercing yet kindly eye. I was excessively vexed and sadly disappointed; particularly as I did not like him to consider me imprudent: but my spirit refused to let me confess as much. I got into the hackney-coach, very disconsolate, and when it stopped at Lady Barres's door there was Mr. Henry again outside, to see me safe into the house. He bowed, saying nothing, and I did the same; I was really very angry, and walked upstairs feeling very much inclined to cry. I just went into the drawing-room, *and looked* out of a window—this time Mr. Henry

was really gone quite out of sight; but the hackney-coach in which I had been driven home against my wish was only very slowly being drawn back to its stand. Savage being still over his dinner, or lounging after it, I ran down-stairs again, and out of the house; then calling the hackney-coach, I feed its driver, and inquired of him the name of the street where he had taken me up, and the nearest way to it; telling him I had forgotten something, to account for what might seem to him a strange inquiry. I walked on, and found the way easily to the house; I ascended its steps this time and knocked at the door, though with a trembling hand and excited feelings! A maid, with a respectable mien, opened the door immediately. I summoned every audacious particle in my blood to my assistance, and inquired in a matter-of-course way, whether "*Mrs.* Henry lived there?" "*Miss* Henry," replied the maid, very innocently, quite unaware of the effect the name produced upon me. I took out a card.

"Will you give her my card, and inquire whether I may see her for a few moments?"

The maid, having asked me into a very small, neat, dining-parlour, left me for a minute, when she returned and ushered me upstairs into a pretty little drawing-room, not gay, but delicately neat. There was a harp;—I quite agree with the author of *Festus*, that "there's something in the shape of harps as if they had been made for music." Also there was a

book-case, filled, to my pleasant surprise, with those dear volumes of quaint and refined literature which George and I had been privileged to study at Ashleigh. I had time to identify them, for though the maid told me Miss Henry would be "down directly" — as such retainers always do—I waited quite a quarter of an hour, in all the suspense of an anticipation I had created for myself, and therefore liked the more.

Then she entered—she herself? not at all: not the tall, slender queen of grace and loveliness; but an oldish lady, tiny but terrific, dressed with awful neatness, in a clear muslin apron and close cap, wearing a warming-pan of a watch and gold spectacles: an apparition repelling in its respectability. The dame made me a curtsey, and requested to know my business; I made a defiant bow, and replied that I could only tell my business to Miss Henry. "*I* am Miss Henry," returned a calm, ruthless voice. I rose—"Oh!" I exclaimed, "I have made a mistake. Pardon me. Good morning." "Good afternoon," said the dame, blinking behind her spectacles, and following me to the door. I went out, biting my tongue with vexation, but before I set foot on the top step of the staircase, from the staircase *above* that landing, descended, like an angel, I thought, at that vexed moment, the tall, slender queen of grace and loveliness. I felt child-like as I caught the lofty sweetness of her expression; she

gazed inquiringly; I turned and bowed, saying, "I wished much to speak to you, but this lady desired me to communicate to her what I had to say. This I could not do, therefore I suppose I must depart without satisfaction." I felt warmly, and no doubt gave that impression.

The old lady laid her diminutive hand upon my arm while I yet addressed the young one, and to my surprise she said, "Young lady, you did not tell me that you wished to see my niece. I obeyed the summons conveyed by the servant. Had you condescended to explain, you would have found me amenable to your desire; though I would still assure you that our retirement has never been similarly invaded. I will immediately leave you with the Miss Henry whom you came to see—it does not surprise me that you were disappointed to see me instead."

I was much struck by the courtly calmness and highly refined accent of this small personage, and flattered by her appreciation—rather ashamed also. I replied, "You are very good, madam; but you may think me very wrong, for I ran away from home to come here—not, however, the home of my heart or my choice. It is better to confess to you, for I cannot remain on sufferance, even where I so earnestly long to stay."

"Not in the draft, then," added the lady I had addressed—"enter!" She opened the drawing-room

door with a stateliness that made the small chamber seem one of regal audience, and she left me with my queen. But now, my object within reach, I trembled: a strange fascination overcame me, and, though I knew she was not married, I really felt a fear lest she should be irrevocably disposed of by promise. For in truth my romantic fancy had in a moment associated her with one very dear to me, and to whom her brother was most dear.

I knew George's taste in beauty as in other things, and that this most beautiful woman would minister to it as completely as she would satisfy his appreciation of all that is pure and noble in character. In her countenance the rare type of true Sarmatian nobility was blent with youth in its blooming freshness, dignified with an air of majesty. Her head was set like a lily on its stem; her eyes of violet blue were fringed with the darkest lashes; her hair was purple black. This beauteous blending of dark hair with blue eyes was one upon which George had ever expatiated to me, even in his boyhood; and his manhood found him too fastidious to be impressed by the ordinary charms of reigning and rival beauties; though he could critically admire women, and with the usual coldness of connoisseurship, even analyze unquestionable charms. This merely by the way.

"I am sorry I was so absurd," I began, directly we were alone, "but I never thought of there being

more than one Miss Henry; and I boldly invented *her* for the occasion. I must explain to you that I saw you walking with Mr. Henry; and, feeling sure you were either his wife or his sister, I inquired for the former and received confirmation of the latter."

"I am happy in being his sister," she replied, in the sweetest voice I ever heard; though I no longer wondered I could not hear those dulcet tones in the street.

"I am sure you must be," I replied, in my usual reckless manner; "though you will be surprised, perhaps, to hear that all the happiness I enjoy, and all my knowledge of that wherein true happiness consists, I owe to him. You must wonder—or, at least, you may."

"I do not, and could not. I recognized your name directly, and so did my aunt, who was really anxious to do anything for one to whose family we are so much indebted. I wish I could thank you as I should like to do, Miss Reynolds; for your amiable and confiding conduct brought my brother much enjoyment and happiness during the time you passed with the excellent nobleman who employs him."

"No, no! that really is too Parisian a strain for this literal London present. I never did anything except do my lessons right, as the children say; and very often wrong. But his instructions are to me priceless treasures. My cousin George would lay down his life for Mr. Henry—and he ought; for,

though he might have grown up ignorant and good, or even clever and not *so* good, under ordinary circumstances, he never could have imbibed the wisdom of a sage, and preserved the innocence of a child, as I may say, thank God! he has done, had it not been for the inestimable advantages of his tutor's guidance and society. George is a noble young man; and I hope and believe that Mr. Henry loves him too."

"I did not know," she answered simply, "that Lord Ailye studied under my brother. I understood that you were his adopted child, and brought up with the young sister of his lordship; and that my brother gave you lessons in languages and science. I fancied Lord Ailye to be as old as my brother."

It was evident Miss Henry did not study the *Peerage*, as is the favourite habit of commoners not in "high life," or she would not have mistaken George for Edward; and I felt rather indignant that Mr. Henry had neglected to mention George. I determined to take instant revenge for this omission, and said, "the present Lord Ailye was George Vaux when I went to Ashleigh, then about seventeen, I think. I suppose you knew where your brother was, Miss Henry?" "Yes," she replied, with pride in her soft voice; "but I directed my letters to the post-office, Woodstane, ——shire."

"Ah! Woodstane was our village, and four miles from Ashleigh. A woman in a man's hat, riding on an ass, used to bring our letters; but I suppose she

left Mr. Henry's behind her. That accounts for Mr. Henry's long walks on Saturday evenings; at which George used to chafe, because they were the only walks in which Mr. Henry never asked for his company. So Mr. Henry ignores George!—I shan't tell him."

"I have not certainly heard the name."

"He was my cousin Edward's next brother. Edward was very peculiar, and deeply religious: he is an angel now. He suffered very much. Mr. Henry alone among human beings possessed his entire confidence, and was his comforter in his sad life and early death. Edward's conduct towards his brothers and sister was faultless—to me far more kind than the strictest virtue asked. My father was a clergyman, and left me, his only child, an orphan, poor and motherless. Edward took me to his home, and I shared in advantages which in themselves are wealth. I was then fourteen, and I was seventeen at his death. George succeeded to the title, and came to town, being strong interested in politics. To his unspeakable delight, Mr. Henry consented to remain with him a while—a privilege for which George is deeply grateful."

"I knew he was private secretary to Lord Ailye in town: he speaks of him as the most generous of patrons and the best and kindest of friends."

"Patrons! friends! George is hardly twenty-two. He is indeed, though I say it, who am his

cousin, a very charming person; so good, and so superior,—in short, so unlike most young men at his age, that I am surprised—at least I wish—I should have hoped Mr. Henry might have thought him worthy—"

"Worthy! of what does not my brother think his benefactor worthy?"

"Of an introduction to his family,—to his sister."

"He is an exile, and as such he has no ties, no family, no name."

"Do not speak so cruelly, Miss Henry. George cares not the least for general society; he is simple in his tastes, and still a hard student of what only a man can learn. You would like him, I fancy."

"Liking or not liking is unknown by us: there is no liberty for us but to exist; and that not where life is freedom. When a brighter day shall dawn, it will be time to speak of making acquaintances, of enjoyment, of pleasure, — as well as duty; and that morning may never dawn."

"It must come at last, however long the night. All Europe groans and prays for it. You are not the only slaves—I beg your pardon, sufferers: I, for one, often pluck at my own chains, and long to loosen them. However, Miss Henry, to leave such thoughts in their own shade, I must tell you that I was once naughty enough to tell Mr. Henry I did not believe his name *was* Henry; for I found no

affinity between its termination and the perpetual 'owski' and 'eski.' He smilingly rebuked me by reminding me of Piast and Jagollen, names which end neitherwise; and the royal consonants led to a feast of golden legends."

"Our name is not Henry: but I cannot tell it you. I would have you know that my brother is obliged to hide a pure and noble name only because he is more pure and noble than his name; not because he is afraid to bear that name, or incapable of further ennobling it."

A diamond drop trembled upon her cheek; she wiped that single tear off hastily, and resumed with soft politeness,—"You said you had business with me, and I have been so rude as not to inquire what it is."

"My business is to inquire whether I may know you when I am of age. I am yet in bondage,—then I hope to be free."

"Do not call it bondage," she said, very gently, "for you do not know what that is."

"I mean no lèse-majesté against the relation who rules over me: it is very proper that she should rule. I only mean that I cannot do as I wish. I can be of use to none, and have no aim in life. But as I intend to remain single, I shall hope to do something, somehow."

She bent upon me her beautiful eyes as though she questioned my sincerity.

"I have often dreamed of friendship," I resumed, "but never of love in marriage."

Still she looked gravely at me. "My dear Miss Reynolds," she replied, "if you were fourteen when my brother knew you first, and that is but four years past, it is not likely that you should know anything about love: either the dream or the reality."

"I assure you that girls here marry at my age; and if before that age, so much the greater éclat surrounds their settlement."

"I am quite aware of such things. In most cases it does not signify; but you are a many-folded character. There are single and double flowers, and surely a convolvulus expands more easily than a rose."

"And shuts more easily too! A very pretty idea. I wish I were like a rose, but I am much more like a primrose; and that, you know, is doomed to 'die unmarried.' However, whether I be plucked from the virgin thorn or left to wither thereon, *may* I know you when I am of age? You will not encounter any worldly obstacles in my acquaintance, as my means will only compass a bee-hive in the depths of the country, or a cupboard in town."

"It would be the sweetest pleasure I ever promised myself; but I dare not even promise; I must only hope. Now, my dear Miss Reynolds, I must ask you whether your friend, Lady Barres, knows you are here?"

"Of course she does not. I shall return exulting, to receive joyfully her sentence of excommunication from the ranks of propriety for ever. But what can you know of Lady Barres?"

"My brother has spoken of her ladyship to me."

"Tell me whether he approves of her, pray."

"He has not taken the liberty of discussing her in any way, you may be sure: he merely mentioned her ladyship as your guardian."

"And never mentioned George! However, I can pardon anybody anything to-day, for I have seen the first person I ever wished to know. I must, indeed, run home as fast as possible; and if Lady Barres turns me out of doors I shall run back to you still faster."

"Stay, stay!" Miss Henry exclaimed, with commanding dignity, "you must not go alone: my aunt is waiting to take you back, for she told me so. Now farewell, dear Miss Reynolds! I am very happy to have seen your sweet face once, and shall remember it always; even though we may never meet again, except where all are free."

I threw myself into her arms. "Good-by, sweet angel," I cried. "Yet don't for a moment imagine that I shall be resigned enough not to *expect* to see you; aye, and know you too, whether you like me or not. But, excuse me, I cannot walk home with that awful person: she is worse than the ghost of Maria Theresa."

"For my sake, my dear Miss Reynolds! Consider, that as Lady Barres was not at home to see you go out *alone*, she may feel less hurt if she only sees you return under protection. Do not commit a double error."

"Then you think I committed *one:* is it unpardonable?"

"There are two sides to such a fault. *I* pardon it, but you know she cannot. You certainly did wrong to come!" Still she smiled so sweetly that her stern words charmed me; and I replied, "I will do just as you please."

I went with the ghost of Maria Theresa, who really behaved like such a thing; for though she was so fine and courtly, she made me walk before her, and kept up close behind me a stiff and silent march. She would not answer me when I spoke; and as she wore a calash drawn forwards over her face, she appeared an *incognita:* as I believe she meant to be. She made me pull the bell, and stood so that the man who opened the door could see her figure, but nothing of her face: only her spectacles, far back in the gloaming of her calash, which made her look like an owl. She did not even murmur good morning to me, her victim; and I fancied she wished the servants to think she was herself a servant.

Savage was on the landing; triumphant malice danced under his meek yellow eyelashes. I knew there would be a scene, and a scene there was; I owed

its moderation to Lord Normanville, who was of course watching Lady Barres as she lay in calm hysterics upon the sofa. No sobs, nor screams, nor laughter; only showers of the softest tears, exquisite exhaustion, and languid tenderness. She was so entirely convinced I had gone out to drown myself, and so certain I had rushed upon suicide because I was not as happy under her roof as I deserved to be, that for some time nothing would convince her she saw before her eyes anything of me except my wraith.

Lord Normanville, who had, in common with most military and all naval officers, a most invincible propensity to indulge women, even in their weakness, was waiting upon her ladyship with every assiduity of affection. He soothed, he petted, he rallied,—he seemed to think her circumstances the loveliest that can invest her sex; and at last he succeeded for the time, and I was allowed to go down to dinner. But, oh! the evil eyes which peered into my bedroom that night: though sweet smiles graced the lips, the passion which spoke in soft words, was of such power that I shook beneath them like a reed! But though Lady Barres bent she could not break me: I *would* not tell her where I had been. I endured "in dogged silence," as she called it, her innuendo, that pierced as the thorn beneath the rose—her soft sneer, that melted like sweet poison in the veins—the suggestion of infamy, which her accents set to music. I could

only thank God that no one except the ghost of Maria Theresa knew where I had been. However, though I told her I would perish before I revealed my secret, I took care to assert my own innocence; and I begged her pardon besides for an act of disobedience which I confessed.

I do not in my heart believe that Lady Barres would have cared whether I had done right or wrong, prudently or indiscreetly; she was only desperately curious: it maddened her, as it maddens many a mere woman, not to be as well acquainted with the affairs of another as is that other herself. She went to bed at last—or rather she left my room—because I pretended to be asleep; and next morning it suited her to be very touchingly forgiving: all tenderness again; she even begged *my* pardon for having hurt my feelings the night before.

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS of course very anxious to see my cousin George, and I got one good thing out of Lady Barres' engagement; for George first made a call of ceremonious congratulation upon her ladyship, and then sent her an invitation to dinner, including his sister and me.

George had not been idle since he came to town; he had engaged with extraordinary energy in the studies and party views, an insight into which necessarily precedes an active interest in politics. The face of affairs at that time had begun to assume the sinister expression which has continued to increase until the present; so that, then as now, a conscientious political career was the most dangerous and heroic, as well as the most fascinating and difficult, in which man may dare success.

Mr. Henry lived with George, ostensibly acting as his secretary, actually being his adviser, friend, and better self,—still, through all the sympathy they shared, his master. I was curious to know whether Mr. Henry had as religiously refrained from mentioning his sister to his pupil as his pupil to his sister.

George's dinner was one of those auspicious but dull occasions when the relations of a lady who is about to be married meet the relations of the gentleman she is about to marry; therefore, however superior, the company was small and select. Besides our brilliant selves, there were present of Lord Normanville's connections the following: A long-fingered girl, whose gloves rucked upon her arms, Lord Normanville's uncle's daughter and only child; the uncle, a duke in his dotage, who could not feed himself, not being present. The horrid Hugh de Brabazone. Hugh de Brabazone's mother's sister, a scraggy

hag in velvet, *décolletée*, who rattled away like a school-girl. Her husband, a rich commoner, with a body like a rolling-pin, and using an ear-trumpet. Two young men and two girls, a nest of orphans, cousins of Lord Normanville who was their guardian, —the young men shy and underbred, the girls underbred and bold, but all rich and born without the average of brains.

Of Lady Barres' connections who graced the table there were the dowager-duchess, no near relative, but what the bride-elect called "a christening connection"—that is, her son's godmother; Lady Barres' aunt, an envoy's wife who had left her husband abroad, and returned to England with two daughters whom she had failed to settle out there, trusting—though her worn face negatived the idea she cherished —to settle them over here; her two daughters, with yellow skins, in white satin; and her son, whose father had secured him an appointment in a foreign city, and who, having disgraced himself therein, had been by its authorities forwarded to his mother-country. Lastly, a clergyman of rank, who had married the eldest daughter of the envoy's wife; he was, however, a widower, and though he was to have the honour of performing the ceremony which should turn Lady Barres into the Countess of Normanville, he made at her such melancholy grimaces that it was apparent he would have preferred the part of bridegroom to that of priest. In revenge, he drank much

wine, smiled upon his plate, and treated the younger ladies present with sublime indifference.

George's house had an aspect of perfect elegance; being equally free from the unsociable comfort of a bachelor's chambers, and the showy extravagance indicative of a reckless life: the dining-room was plain and rich, the drawing-room delicate and sparkling.

Mr. Henry was not at table, but when the gentlemen rejoined us after dinner, I saw him enter also. I could not get at George, who was leading the long-fingered girl to his new piano, having requested her to thaw the keys for him; so I ventured to bow to Mr. Henry, to whom none of the guests had spoken. He returned my greeting instantly, and crossing the room, seated himself beside me, to my great surprise and pleasure. The disgraced heir of the envoy had seated himself on my other hand; but Mr. Henry asked me, in a grave voice, some question about Lassala's *History of the Castilian Poets*, which drove the ex-attaché as far as possible out of our way. The moment we were alone, Mr. Henry said, in the same tone of voice, "I have a favour to ask of Miss Reynolds." "Name it," replied that young lady, under the impression that she was about to be lectured for letting her intelligence stagnate. "Will you oblige me," he went on, "by making a promise to tell no person I have a sister, or that you have seen her?"

This was charming! Even Guy Fawkes had time

to arrange his faggots and secrete his lantern before his plot was discovered: I had not so much as organized mine.

"Really," I replied, "I cannot exactly promise that, Mr. Henry; but I promise to tell no person who would presume upon the information."

His eye kindled, and his lip curled.

"You are a child," he retorted, "or you would not trifle so far as to make an exception: which, indeed, I may remind you, you have no right to make. I *might* remind you that I could command your secrecy, yet I only request; and it is not like a woman to deny what it has cost me so much to ask you."

"Oh, I did not mean to refuse anything you have a right to ask; but I think you might trust *me* without a promise."

"No,—for I am well aware that you will keep a promise, yet that nothing less will bind you."

I felt piqued, and could not answer. He waited a minute, and then resumed, his accents trembling.

"I beseech you, with the deepest concern and anxiety, to promise me: give me the word which it is necessary I should hear."

"But I must have time to breathe: it is *not* necessary in my case."

"Imminently so! Your word—this moment."

"Ridiculous; it is not a matter of life or death!"

"It is a matter of peace and conscience—far more

precious to me. Say I am selfish, if you please: but it is not so! You might consider how painful it is to me to sit beside you in this company; how much more painful to ask you again, and over again, what your lips might have prevented my asking more than once—that once being sufficient, as you *should* have known."

"Do not be so angry, Mr. Henry! It seemed such a storm about a trifle, and I wanted to ask you the reason."

"It is you who have raised the storm—the trifle had been easily dismissed. As for the reason, I thought you had been above the only foible of your sex: but had you asked it, I should not have answered."

"And yet you expect *me* to promise."

"I did expect:—I expect no longer; I humbly entreat."

"Just tell me first whether your sister told you I was so rude."

"I will tell you nothing till I have your promise."

"I did not mean to tell any one"—I was going to add, "except George;" but George was just passing by, leading the long-fingered young lady, and when he had gone out of hearing I had collected myself sufficiently to perceive the imprudence of mentioning his name, even if I had any right to do so—which I had not.

"Do not be so wayward and so cruel! I did not

think you could keep any one in suspense and pain so wilfully."

This time his glance was sad: I am ashamed to say that pathos moves me more than manly determination.

"What then am I to promise, Mr. Henry?"

"That you will tell no one I have a sister, or that you have seen her."

"The first clause includes the second."

"Well, the first, then—promise quickly."

I remembered Portia's version of the pound of flesh, and my woman's wit suggested it was easy to promise *that*, and perform it too, without marring the plot I had half designed. So I said, with much solemnity, "I promise to tell no one you have a sister; and if you are pleased to require it, I will take mine oath."

He devoured my words. "I thank you very gratefully—your word is all-sufficient. And now"—with a manner that changed to spring from winter in a moment—"let me thank you still more gratefully for your kindness to my sister."

"Then let me thank you for having such a sister; she is so exquisitely beautiful and good."

"Having thanked you, I shall ask you not to mention her again. Let me inquire into your studies; how advances Runic, the many in the one?"

"I am getting on a little—that is, very badly—by myself."

Then off we went upon the stream of Northern

literature, and discussed Walhalla till I wished there had never been a hero born of woman. I let him say a great deal, and then I boldly inserted, "You must tell me whether *she* told you I went? You deny me both grammar and breeding!"

"No one told me: my ear whispered it to my brain. In other words, I knew your footsteps behind us."

"You knew my footsteps!"

"That is a very savage accomplishment; the nomade tribes of America know friend from foe, and man from brute, by the tread—and that, too, roods away."

"But how could you know I followed, after you had left me at home?"

"I turned the corner of a street, and went into a shop; for, knowing your disposition, I feared you would again return. I saw you, and I watched you safely into the house; also I saw you brought forth again, under protection which made it unnecessary for me to offer mine."

Then we talked of books again, and poetry, and art: which last I hated till Mr. Henry had shown me its relation to philosophy and science. Presently George, who had certainly contrived to make everybody talk, came and stood for a minute by my side. "I have scarcely seen your face, Bice, but I have been thinking about you: I knew you were being entertained better than anybody else. And what do

you think of my house, furnished under the auspices of two single gentlemen?"

"I think it charming: nay it is perfect."

"Not perfect—it is what man was when created, but before he breathed;—it wants a soul."

"You are mysterious: there is nothing wanting, so far as I can see, except that it is a London house."

"I should like a lady in it, Beatrice;" he whispered playfully, "but I cannot marry."

"Why, in the name of all that is possible, not?" I was well pleased with this opportunity of glancing at Mr. Henry; he would not look at me, however, only at George. George laughed, and in answer to my question, "Only for one reason," said he, "I cannot find any one I should like, or who would like me."

"Too modest and too honest," observed Mr. Henry: "there is a mental reservation, be very sure."

"If all marriages were as conveniently arranged as between parties who know exactly what they *do* want," answered George, looking towards the sofa on which Lady Barres and Lord Normanville were sitting, "it would be very easy: but then I suppose we should not care about it; for I remember, Mr. Henry, you told me once I preferred climbing the balusters to walking straight up the stairs! However, *you* must help me here as you have done through everything else—first teach me what I want, and then supply it!"

I could see that George spoke in perfect simplicity; he knew not as much as I did.

"Everything in its season, my dear lord," replied Mr. Henry lightly. "We do not gather roses until June in this climate, and your April is not yet past."

"The time for caprice and fancy, smiles and sighs. I plead innocent, even of moods so charming." And as he spoke he left us. I waited an instant, and then observed, "I hope George has not disappointed your expectations, Mr. Henry!"

"He has crowned my utmost hopes. I believe that his career will transcend, and his life excel, even my expectations; which are very high, Miss Reynolds. He is truly virtuous, and will be truly great."

"I thought—I feared, that you did not think him worthy of an introduction to your sister, as you have not introduced him, nor even mentioned her."

His piercing eye searched my countenance, to my confusion.

"Once for all," he said, very seriously—"for I will not again be brought to the subject—I do not wish my sister to see Lord Ailye. I believe you have good sense, as I am sure you have generosity enough to refrain from enforcing any more confidence—I will not *give* it."

It is my dreadful disposition always to feel saucy when I am lectured, even though I merit the sermon, as I certainly did that night.

"Do not be vexed, Mr. Henry! I will never even ask it; as to enforcing, it is very tyrannical of you to say I did so. I hope you will forgive my unlucky sincerity. I must have been born under one of the morning stars while it was singing, for I never can hold my tongue when I am happy; and seeing your sister has made me happier than I ever remember to have been: though I should be *most* unhappy were I never to see her again. I think she will let me."

"You have it not in your power to make or seek acquaintances, Miss Reynolds: it is as much your duty to submit to the utmost restraint which is now imposed upon you, as it will be your duty when you are *fully* formed, to submit to no constraint of your principles or your opinions; for *then* these will be also formed and ready for fruition."

"Suppose they should form wrong, and I should run wild altogether?"

"That will be your own fault! but it is as impossible as that *I* should again grow young!"

It may seem strange that Lady Barres allowed me to sit by Mr. Henry, and talk to him so long; but she was only too thankful that he should be interposed, body and mind, between Lord Normanville and me. And she told me when we were driving home, that Mr. Henry and I looked charming side by side.

CHAPTER XIII.

Perhaps persons who have no romance on their own accounts, are all the more romantic on behalf of others; I know I was, and am still. I lay awake nearly until morning, searching every avenue of possibilities through which George might meet Miss Henry. For, not to be obtuse—which is to be abhorred of all readers, and justly too—I quite understood why Mr. Henry did not wish his sister to see my cousin. No preternatural acuteness this of mine; my natural sympathy with Mr. Henry was the cause: in his place I should have acted the same. He knew his sister to be exquisitely adapted to his pupil, and I felt, perhaps too proudly, that George was worthy of her. Mr. Henry, in fact, wished to save his own pride and his sister's peace at once; and had I not been sure he wanted to save *his* pride, I might not have felt so anxious to disturb *her* peace. So I laid every faggot neatly, and trimmed my lantern, before I went to sleep.

Lady Barres had a box at the opera which she never used; as some irreligious persons have pews in their parish churches which they never enter. I had only been once to the opera, and then felt dis-

appointed; but I was glad I had been once, because it gave me the option of going again without being wondered at. As May warmed into earliest June, balls and parties thickened, and dinners thinned. Lady Barres, who had dined everywhere with Lord Normanville, began to dance instead; and now Rowena invariably accompanied her, to meet the horrid Hugh de Brabazone.

I watched all invitations and replies, and at length selected an evening on which Lady Barres had three engagements from home—an opera night, but not a house-night. Next I laid siege to the heart of Burnett, Lady Barres' fag, as she may be remembered—a person I had never noticed except to thank her for giving me cups of tea. She was employed in Lady Barres' dressing-room, all hours at work,—no one knows, out of the charmed circle, how stingy are some fine ladies—at work upon the lawn and cambric which form the substratum of the trousseau. French patterns, of course, she had; one for everything: but how many dreary impressions had to be taken from that proof!

While Lady Barres was driving, I went to her dressing-room, condoled with the enslaved sempstress, then fetched my thimble and worked with her; much to her astonishment, which deepened into gratitude. We got on so well, that we had finished what Lady Barres expected to see ready long before we knew she would return; and then I coaxed

Burnett to put her bonnet on and go out with me for a walk. First I beguiled her into a confectioner's shop, and fed her upon tarts unto repletion; then I got her into an immense music-shop, and while she was looking at the fierce portrait of a professional hero of that day, I purchased a box on the third tier; taking care first to examine a plan of the opera-house, that I might secure one as nearly as possible opposite to that of Lady Barres': and as the performance I had selected was of date a week to come, I succeeded.

I continued to assist Burnett all the week, and was obliged, at last, to give myself airs to prevent her from thinking I liked her desperately; which was not the case. The very day before the performance and Lady Barres' triple engagement, I sent the box-ticket to Miss Henry, inclosed in a note which I slipped into the post while Burnett was walking with me. First I had thought to entreat Miss Henry to be present at the opera that night, and in the box reserved for her; but I soon reversed that intention, fearing she would suspect me of having another motive than to give her pleasure. I therefore simply requested her to accept the ticket, and assured her she should not be intruded upon by me. Then I asked Burnett to escort me to Lady Barres' everlastingly empty box; there was no difficulty with her, except to prevent her from kissing me on the spot. Next, I had to ask Lady Barres' permission to

go with Burnett; and my guardian was so pleased I had taken a fancy to "low society," in Burnett's person, that she made no demur, only observing that she never knew what the eccentric little person would do next.

Lastly, I wrote to George, and requested him to come to Lady Barres' box next evening for five minutes, intimating that I should be also in it, and that I should be pleased to see him. I was obliged to ask him to come *alone*, lest he should take a fancy to bring Mr. Henry: that was all I feared, knowing well that if his sister had not mentioned to him my visit to her, she would not tell him of my having sent her the box. It never occurred to me that George might think it odd I should beg him to come *alone*, as it seemed to myself very natural *because* I was not thinking of myself.

The evening came; Lady Barres went out with Rowena, and Burnett came downstairs dressed, to make me coffee before I went. She was habited in a white watered silk dress which Lady Barres had worn thrice, with a cornelian necklace, and a full-blown rose upon the top of her head seemed to grow out of a very high comb; she carried an opera-glass in a black case, which she had hired of the maid L'Estrange, who had borrowed it from Lord Normanville's valet: also, she grinned like a shark, and was perfumed with Portugal water.

We got safely into Lady Barres' box about the middle of the overture, and I was disappointed at perceiving that the box nearly opposite was empty: it made me feel like itself, a blank. It yet glared in vacancy before my eyes when the curtain drew up. I neither saw nor heard anything that followed, and I had given up George, as well as Miss Henry, in five minutes; such was the impatience of my disappointment. Very soon, however, George glided in, full dressed; but almost breathless: he told me he had only received my summons an hour before, "which I instantly obeyed, with the greatest pleasure," he added. But though far too polished to express or show surprise, I could see him glance furtively at me while I was gazing across the house, still upon vacancy; and in terror lest he should only stay five minutes, as I had asked him, I was endeavouring to invent a reason for my request, when he observed, "I did not dare to bring Mr. Henry, as I should have liked to do, Bice, for I fancied you would be full. There is plenty of room, I see, however."

I was terribly annoyed, and fearing now that he might even fetch Mr. Henry, I began to chatter. I endeavoured to be witty, and was of course absurd: I ridiculed the performers, even quizzed the prima donna, whom I had named in order to entice him when I wrote; I rattled nonsense and raved æsthetics. Still the opposite box was empty. I felt my cheeks

burn warmer and warmer, and at last George even *looked* surprised; his colour deepened too. I did not mind what he thought: I did not yet despair. At last I was rewarded: at the close of the second act, I saw two forms glide into the empty box and take their places, silent as the shapes that change in a dream; and one more lovely than ever visionary angel shone.

The ghost of Maria Theresa was the second form, as I had expected. She looked like Cinderella's godmother, a scarlet fairy; being folded from head to foot in a red mantle, from a foreign loom, edged with the richest fur. Her spectacles gleamed like the watchful eyes of a mild and harmless dragon. Miss Henry looked—how fair! in a white dress that veiled her arms and bust, yet could not hide the grace of her slight but majestic figure. She wore no jewel, nor a single flower to mar the violet radiance of her eyes and the rich bloom of her lips. One moment she stood erect, then leaned forwards slightly; many lorgnettes were turned from the stage towards the dazzling apparition. Then most suddenly, though gracefully, she shrank back into the shade, and took her seat in the furthest corner of the box. The scarlet fairy turned, and menaced with her glittering eyes every face as far as she could see.

But before Miss Henry had retreated, George had seized my arm. "See, see!" he exclaimed, in an

impetuous whisper: "Look, look! How exquisitely, ravishingly beautiful. How strange—more than strange! Not the beauty, but the likeness. Look, Bice, look! Tell me who she is like."

I was scared. I had thought he might be suddenly struck, perhaps permanently affected, by her beauty; but it had never occurred to me that he would recognize the likeness to her brother. It was a startling likeness, and I had felt it, too; but I did not think a man so young as George would have traced it, because the beauty of Mr. Henry's face was marred by strong lines of thought and melancholy, and wasted by suspense and suffering; hers was bright as a lily freshly blossomed, and softly moulded as a pearl. Besides, he was much her senior; and it might be the foreign cast of features, perfect in themselves, rather than their actual beauty, which made them seem so much alike.

However, to return to George. I had not replied at first; nor did it seem to signify, for he raved on to himself: "His sister—it must be: yet it cannot. How can it? His image—but that face is divine! And what colour on earth, or rather in heaven, are her eyes? Do tell me, Bice, for you see she courts the shade."

"I believe them to be blue, so far as I could judge from such a distance. Who is it, then, you think her like?" Very coolly I spoke, but he turned round and stared upon me.

"Really — actually, you pretend you do not know!"

"How should I know, when you did not tell me? She is perfectly beautiful: I never saw her equal."

"You surprise me! Indeed I cannot believe you do not know: his face is as familiar to you as to me."

"Oh, it is Mr. Henry you mean. I do see a national resemblance; you know how beautiful are the Polish women—their noble women; and doubtless she is one."

"Bice, Mr. Henry is acquainted with all the Poles in this country, women as well as men: he has told me so. He would have mentioned *her* to me; for the beauty of his countrywomen is a favourite theme of his. And how is it that they are alone? No, I am certain, positively sure that she is related to him: I must discover the fact. I have it!"—he exclaimed next moment. "Do not fear, Bice; I will return to you; but I shall go to the box and present my card to that witch in a red cloak, and ask her whether the name of her protégé is Henry. If she negatives, why, it is very simple: I can make a thousand apologies for mistaking one lady for another, bow coldly, and retreat. I go this moment."

And he would have gone, if I had not stopped him. His impetuosity had made me dumb; I had never given him credit for an impetuous nature, and scarcely knew how to deal with this outbreak. In an

unguarded moment I said, "you could not find out; for Henry is not his real name." The instant I had said so, I condemned myself. George turned to me in very natural surprise. "Not his real name? Did he tell you so the other evening? you looked mysterious both of you, I saw that. For Heaven's sake tell me what his name *is* then, if you know!"

"I do *not* know, George: we were not speaking about his name the other night. But I remember that at Ashleigh we said we thought it could not be Henry."

"I don't remember saying it: I'm sure I never thought so!"

"I did, then; and I took it for granted that you agreed with me, because we always agreed."

"Then pray let us agree now, Bice; so don't thwart me."

"You had better not go, George; excuse me!"

"My tiny Thalestris of old times, why what fiend of fear has spirited away your courage? Can you not trust me in my own hands?"

"Listen to me, George; it will be of no avail. That ladybird will give you no information. She is insane; I know it by the glare of her eyes."

"Then I will salute the white lady herself, which I should prefer."

"George, dear George, listen to me. It would be very imprudent; for once, oblige me by confiding in *my* prudence: you shall not repent of it in the end."

He looked at me with a curious expression, half saucy, half gentle: more curiously still he gazed: his eyes searched every lineament of my face. I suppose my countenance paled; and I was very uncomfortable, fearing he would ask what reward I offered "in the end." But no! to my great relief he settled himself in his seat, saying in a sweet, though melancholy voice: "I will not do it, Bice; for I respect your prudence as much as I admire your spirit. In truth"—he added playfully,—"you might call me to account for acting the part of a carpet-knight so ill; a box is a drawing-room in miniature, and I came to see *you* here!"

I was much relieved; but could not make him out. He devoted himself to me entirely from that moment till the curtain fell, and did not once look over at the other box. We did not stay for the ballet, nor did the lady and the ladybird. George did not even glance, as *we* went out, to see whether they were gone; and he drove home with us to Lady Barres' door.

When alone again, I felt no remorse. I had made no actual compromise with conscience; having only tested my own discrimination. I had intended, if George admired Miss Henry, to follow it up, of course; though I had not decided how: and if he had not admired her, all would have remained as it was before. My experiment had not failed; it had succeeded only too well. I knew not how to act. I dreaded lest George, who had no secrets from his

friend, should describe Miss Henry to her brother, and that Mr. Henry should interpret my promise to imply all *he* meant it to include: feeling sure that in such case, however, he would immediately communicate with me. So I went to sleep and dreamed of Lady Barres in gold spectacles, and George muffled up in a red cloak, carrying me between them into Westminster Hall, where I saw Mr. Henry with a calash on, and heard him make a speech full of the terrors of the law.

Next day, however, I heard nothing, and saw nothing: no note from George, nor stately apparition of George's friend. I felt very blank, and a fool for my pains: so again the next day, and the next. Miss Henry had not written to me, either; but then I had earnestly entreated her *not* to write, and she was too sincere a person to do what you asked her not. Four days afterwards, when I had given everything up, George called in the afternoon; Lady Barres was out, I was at home, alone. He was shown into the drawing-room, and I went to him. Very singular were my sensations for the first few minutes.

He sat down beside me, fixed his eyes upon the carpet, drew out his pocket-handkerchief and returned it to his pocket; took out a pocket-book, opened it, shut it as if he had made a mistake, and pocketed it again; then he rose, and walking to the mantelshelf, began to trifle with the lustres. It struck me that this silence and embarrassment were attributable to

the excitement which he had betrayed in my presence about Miss Henry, and I wished him to know that I did most fully sympathise with him *now*. I went and stood by his side. He was trembling violently; his eyes were downcast. I touched his arm gently—he turned and murmured; then spoke wild words, cruel in their kindness! earnest, but cold! And wilder words were answered; my soul put forth its powers: one man at least, that hour, read a woman's inmost heart, and learned its secrets. * * *

An hour afterwards we still talked, very differently however. The calm was restored to that stream of full confidence, which never accident before or since has ruffled. I could not tell George anything he did not know, as far as the knowledge of Mr. Henry's having a sister was concerned; for he declared he *knew* that the lady he had seen was to be identified. However, it was in vain he teazed or entreated me to tell him how I first became acquainted with her; for I had confessed so much, though not that I knew *who* she was. It was necessary I should explain that I had invited George to behold *her* at the opera, or I could not have succeeded—noble-hearted as he was—in convincing him I did not invite him on my own account. I also took care to infuse into my cousin a belief in the fact of my having wished *her* to behold *him*. Still I would not, and did not, name her: I did not even hint that Mr. Henry had extracted from me a promise of secrecy; nor did I mention him to

George, until the end of our conversation. Seeing him at last look anxious and rather dejected, as though he saw not how to compass an introduction to the lady who had touched his fancy; I took pity upon his perplexity, and said :—

"Now, George, I have a favour to ask you. Will you manage Lady Barres so that you can take me home to-night to dine with you; for I must see Mr. Henry, and you must be present while I do so."

"Mr. Henry *is* then obviously concerned!" he exclaimed.

"I have not told you so! I do not wish to see him until quite the evening."

Accordingly, when Lady Barres came in, George told her he was going to carry me off to dinner at his house, as he wished me to meet a lady of his acquaintance. He alluded to his new housekeeper, who had arrived that morning! so he told me afterwards.

George delicately permitted me to dine alone, and after dinner he brought Mr. Henry into the drawing-room. I waited for George to speak, and he for me; at length, seeing Mr. Henry move towards the door, as though he thought himself in the way, I gasped forth, "Will you stay? I have something to tell you; and so has George."

Back he came, and sat down between us, looking expectantly from one to the other. Having begun, I went on bravely.

"George has seen your sister, Mr. Henry, and it

was through my instrumentality: but I sacredly kept my promise!"

He turned to me with a stern gaze: anger and pain darkened his countenance.

"Just hear me, Mr. Henry! hear how I kept my word, and gratified my pique at once: for I was *very* angry with you for refusing to let George see her!"

He rose from the sofa and began to pace the room, slowly and proudly. I began to be afraid lest George should fear his anger, as did not I.

"Pray consider the circumstances of the case, Mr. Henry! An opportunity of seeing the most beautiful angel in the world was all I afforded George; for this, part of the blame I take to myself. I did not prepare George; I did not excite his imagination. I might have done all this, you know; but I left it all to destiny."

"Tush!" murmured he, and turned again to walk.

"I thought Miss Henry would like to hear Pasta, and I sent her an order. I did not even entreat her to be present; but she came as I had hoped. George happened to spend the evening with me, in Lady Barres' box, and the whole house lay between them. I did not call his attention to her; but he saw her: he knew her."

"He worshipped her!" George broke in passionately. "Hear me, my only friend; for, saving Bice, I have no other. It is vain for me to plead

my character—you know it. You know too that my heart is untouched by any other fancy; that my hopes, if rash, are pure. You told me not to pluck my rose till June—lo! *June* is here!"

Still the proud steps pacing to and fro. George flew to him, and walked by his side. He stopped, and sighing deeply, looked at George.

"And she, whom you had no right to know—whom *you* had no right to discover,"—he sternly glanced at me: "what of *her* heart and fancy?"

"If she has suffered for another, she shall forget her sufferings in my love. If"—continued George in a lower voice—"she has never loved, she might—she might love me!"

I felt indignant, and I could not hold my tongue. "George!" I cried, "Mr. Henry is only testing you! He cannot mean to be so cruel. It is not fair, Mr. Henry: you know you said to me, 'I do not wish my sister to see Lord Ailye.'"

"And how will you—how dares any one except her brother—interpret those words?"

"I am not afraid of you, Mr. Henry, though George is. I should do the same were I in your place."

"What do you mean, my dearest Bice?" asked George in great confusion. "Explain those words, my dear sir, I beeseech you! Why did you wish me not to see an angel? If it was to spare my feelings, it was kind, but cruel. I would not but

have seen her, though I should suffer always for it!"

"I thought you might admire her, my dear lord," said Mr. Henry in his old sweet melancholy voice; "but I did not wish it!"

"I can understand your feeling, Mr. Henry. *I* would not marry a man of rank, myself. And if I were a man, an exile, and loved George as I know you do, and admired him as even you must, Mr. Henry, yet I should not like him to marry *my* sister. I should not like it to be said that an exile's sister married an Englishman of good position; my whole nature would rebel against it: but it would be very wicked in me, if she liked him."

"Bice! Bice!" cried George, in great pain; and hastening towards me, he covered my mouth with his hand.

"She is a child, my lord," said Mr. Henry, in a tone that seemed to blend amusement with contempt, "and will one day be a woman, that is all! Miss Reynolds interprets my motive wrongly. And to prove this, my dear friend, long and truly loved, and honoured,—though so young!—I will confess it was not the rank of the Englishman deterred me. My own is the blood of princes; though they have ceased awhile to reign. Through the veins of my sister there flows a stream purer than the Norman blood which is your proudest boast; add centuries to your race, before it can equal the antiquity of ours."

These proud words were uttered with dignified simplicity.

"You have drawn blood, Bice," muttered poor George: "how could you so torture me! My dear Mr. Henry, you to whom I owe so much, I owe an apology for my wild little cousin; whom indeed you must forgive: she did not intend to wound your feelings; and you know I am honourable."

"Honourable and noble, and dear to me as a brother," exclaimed Mr. Henry.

"And you would seal up from me the source of happiness!"

"Your happiness is dear to me; but hers is dearer."

"And yet—you do not speak as though her happiness were in other hands. No, you would have surely told me so. You do not think that I should destroy it!"

"You form so much of my happiness that it would please me to think you would perfect hers. Let that suffice: I can say no more."

"Then you will help me—you will give me your countenance, your sanction? How else could I approach her presence?"

"Pardon me: that I cannot give. Do not ask it."

"But you permit—I may mention your name?"

"Not in her presence—I command *that*. You will think me despotic as the rulers of my poor lost country—but there are circumstances which render

it necessary I should exact your promise, whatever chances, not to use my name."

"You do not then forbid me to seek admission to her presence; which itself is heaven to me?"

Mr. Henry left the room.

"Is he angry—or hurt? can he suspect me of caprice or weakness?" asked George.

"George! it is only to spare his own pride. I knew that from the first!"

"Not so—he is too serious: I fear, I know not what. Bice, my kindest friend, as you have seen her you might introduce me—if you would."

"Will you promise to let me go first and prepare the way, then?"

"What man ever yet said nay, when a woman was inclined to suffer in his stead? You shall—but when?"

"To-morrow, if you will call and tell Lady Barres that you have come to take me for a drive. She can think what it pleases her: it will not matter long."

George took me home that night, and the next afternoon he called for me about four o'clock, and took care to say that he might possibly carry me to dine with a friend of his at Kew: of course, he had a friend there, and I had driven there with him before. On this present occasion, however, we drove to another region. I left my cousin in the carriage, and sent up my card to the elder Miss Henry. The

pigmy came into the drawing-room, not a whit more cordial than in the first instance; rather colder perhaps: but this time she did not ask my business. I went to the point at once, as I always do.

"Madam, my cousin Lord Ailye has by chance seen your lovely niece, and conceived for her a high admiration and deep interest. He requested of her brother the honour of an introduction to her; Mr. Henry refused, but did not, however, forbid Lord Ailye to seek an interview. I have come to ask you whether I may bring my cousin to see you?—He is waiting outside. May I say you will receive him?"

"I cannot see Lord Ailye," was her short reply, "without my nephew's permission. I act for him?"

I felt so indignant—so incensed, that I could scarcely refrain from giving vent to the angry and bitter words that rose to my lips. My cheeks and brow burned, and the feelings that I with difficulty repressed, must have shown themselves in my kindling eyes and quivering lips. With an effort I commanded myself, and urged that not only did Mr. Henry not forbid George to make a way for himself, but he admitted there were circumstances which prevented his sanctioning the mention of his *name* to his sister; but these circumstances he could not reveal. I pleaded earnestly—passionately even—for George; and besought this diminutive duenna to tell me what obstacle stood in the way of his happiness.

She looked at me keenly, and said:

"And this noble cousin; is his nature as impulsive and sincere as yours?"

I felt that I had mollified the witch, and replied,—"His nature is sincere as mine—but not so impulsive though his feelings are more ardent, and his soul far nobler."

"Can he bear suspense as well as you do?"

This was spoken with a smile that sweetened the irony.

"He cannot bear suspense like me: he thinks that life is too short to be wasted in suspense."

"Happy ye, to whom life is more than suspense. Bring him hither at once; but the moment I bid you depart, begone."

I promised—but thought to myself, "I will not answer for George." It is pleasant to feel that a superior person has taken a fancy to one; I felt hopeful that Miss Henry would more than fancy George.

CHAPTER XIV.

I WENT to the carriage and told George the news. He permitted me, for once, to escort *him!* Miss Henry received him very graciously, and he looked *exactly as* I wished him to look—dignified, yet modest *and really* noble. She requested him to be

and he took a chair at a respectful distance from her. I could see that he was struggling to speak; but with a wave of her hand she calmed him, and spoke herself, placidly, but in measured, solemn, and almost Sybilline tones.

"And how should I begin, young lord and gentle lady? In this free England,—so free that it dares shelter the sad ones who are not,—what should you know of our people, with their persecutors, their woes, and their wrongs?—the last the greatest—or how feel for them if you knew?"

"I know, and I feel for them," replied George. "We have long since learned that sad but glorious history. If I live, I will do more than sympathize—I will try to help."

"The flower rooted in the valley is not wet with the showers of the mountains—the bird that builds in the homestead tree does not feel the storms that shake the eyrie of the eagle."

"Well, I dare not say I suffer—but I grieve for those patriot exiles. Pray tell me, madam, what are these circumstances which forbid me to mention a name that would at once procure me an interview with your lovely niece."

"A true hero is a hero under all circumstances—under the slightest circumstances often the greatest hero."

"That is Mr. Henry, we are well aware," I said, "*but we want* to know something else."

"Thousands have been expatriated and exiled, their hearts outraged and their homes desolated; thousands of the race who call him brother have seen their pure patriotism flouted by the robe of imperial scorn and stifled in its folds; thousands, in pursuit of freedom, have wandered destitute over the western world, until death set them free. But these of *necessity* have suffered; being driven forth there was no alternative: they were *forced* to yield. My nephew was self-exiled from a country he adores: he voluntarily quitted a service which ensured him public honour and private esteem. Yes, he whom oppression only riveted more firmly to public duty, was prompted by private duty—and by domestic duty, which holds so few!—to abandon a career which seemed to promise an issue in triumphant success.

"My brother was the proud and happy father of this brave soul and that lovely maiden, Casimir and Maya—for I may tell you the names which they bear under 'the crystal cross.' Their father was worthy of such children—every accomplishment adorned his person, and every virtue his mind: his rank less than his character raised him above others. He was a profound scholar: the language of every country was as familiar to him as to those of our embassy of old time, who made the French courtiers blush because these could not answer save in their own tongue, while ours addressed them in many languages. *He was brave* as a lion, and received the crown of a

patriot's martyrdom—a soldier's death, fighting for his country: he fell with Poniatowski, and almost at his side. To his son, whom he had trained himself, and to me, his only sister, he left the precious charge of his daughter, then only eight years old.

"I hastened from Vienna, where, from misfortunes unnecessary to explain, I had fixed my home; I endeavoured by every care and devotion to soften the rigour of the noble son's affliction, and to supply to my little niece the place of the mother she had never known: for Maya's beautiful mother had perished at her birth, in the midst of one among the many political convulsion of her country.

"Peace, though false, had been restored about the time I returned to Warsaw; and, despite the ever-recurring shocks of the political earthquakes that devastate our country, my nephew's prospects were brightening, and he retained the remnant of his fortune without interference of the ruling powers. He was indeed singularly favoured; for, gradually evincing his splendid talents for affairs, he was called into public life more and more, until he filled the highest offices left open by the charter of the constitution. And though powerless of himself to promote the great cause of national independence, his influence enabled him to mitigate the condition of his countrymen: calm endurance succeeded to wild confusion, passive to active suffering.

"*His only* domestic occupation was the education

of his sister. She manifested extraordinary intelligence, but, alas! also extraordinary beauty. One of the estates of his ancestry had been restored to her brother, and he lived there in such privacy that only the most intimate of his friends knew of Maya's existence. Other domestic ties he had abjured from the commencement of his public career: it was his axiom that a devoted patriot should espouse the cause of Liberty, and hers alone. And as events might futher darken the aspect of his beloved country, he determined he would have no wife to be torn from his bosom—no issue of his body to be enslaved upon their own soil.

"You know who commands—who is said to *protect* our country: the regent is kinsman and creature of the tyrant we hate yet fear. You have heard how he outraged our faith and our allegiance; promised all, bestowed nothing; gave us, for the bread we asked, a stone—he who has crushed our rights in his hand, and trampled our wrongs beneath his foot; who fills his prisons with the bravery, the flower of our race: who owns no law but the law of lust, no principle but selfishness; and to whom no man's character is sacred, and the virtue of no woman pure——"

"Worthy of the imperial family whom he honours by disgracing!" exclaimed George, flushing with indignation. She resumed—

"*A Russian* of rank, whom I cannot name, was

jealous of my nephew, whose graces of person, persuasive prudence, and splendid talents for affairs, had won the tacit approbation of the Grand Duke himself.

"This Russian nobleman had, through the sympathy of an evil nature, great influence over the Grand Duke. He dared not circulate calumny against one who could disarm it—for Poland would have returned the poisoned shaft into his own bosom—but he gained the royal ear by the seductive whisper of the fiend. Having in an unhappy hour caught sight of Maya in her brother's carriage—she never *walked* to take the air in the city—he was astonished at her beauty, and found means to discover her name. Scarcely twenty-four hours afterwards he asked her hand, in a letter addressed not to her brother but to herself: it was written in a haughty, insolent tone, more like a demand than a supplication, and it drew forth her womanly spirit in disdain; though she was then an innocent girl of fifteen years, she wrote a gentle but cold and firm refusal. You will wonder why her brother did not answer for her; but she dared not mention the circumstance to him. Child as she was, she had too well learned the peril of his position; and she knew that to excite his indignation might lead to his destruction: for the character of this audacious and subtle courtier, notorious alike for vice and crime, would have enforced a MAN to revenge what a woman could only reject with scorn.

"*It was with* apprehension rather than relief that

I found the count took no notice of the letter. For a week we remained in quiet; my nephew came and went as usual, and it was evident he had not been appealed to. The poor child was perfectly restored, and happy, but for the sadness which was her hereditary portion. One evening she was reading to her brother, when a private messenger brought a royal invitation—or rather an order in the form of an invitation—for my nephew to attend a midnight revel at the palace, and to escort his sister. The palace was the abode of the royal braggart, and is entrenched and fortified.

"It would have been as easy to refuse such an invitation as to refuse to mount the scaffold had that been ordered instead. Her brother knew this: and he would not have trembled to die—but he trembled while he bade me dress our darling in a simple girlish costume, and his countenance fell when he saw that her beauty was more charming when thus arrayed; but he smiled upon her, and assured her fondly that this greatest of all compliments would issue in his exaltation.

"I was too well aware of the necessity of their departure to expect their return. I prayed for resignation—which is all the desolate and desecrated dare to ask—and I prayed for her death rather than her dishonour. I had uttered no prayer for their safety; but they returned, two hours after midnight, before *the first dimness* of the dawn.

"'Put out the light,' were my nephew's first words. There had been a lamp in the child's bed-chamber, where I slept with her, and had been kneeling. Then he went and stood upon the steps of the doorway, and ordered his servant to take the horses out from the carriage in which they had returned, and put them in the stable. He spoke distinctly and in a loud voice, knowing there were spies in the street who would hear the order. He then re-entered the house, leaving the doors unbarred: a precaution which I knew was to elude the vigilance of the spies. Then he took me into a back room, and told me hurriedly that the Grand Duke had received them with much ceremony, and dismissed them shortly. 'We should be lost,' he added, 'if it were not for the faculty God has bestowed upon me of *reading the face of a man and the heart of a devil.*'

"All was still in darkness, and he bade me wrap the child and myself in travelling-dresses, while he fastened round Maya's throat a pearl necklace which had been her mother's. This was all we took, except a few necessaries which could be carried in the hand. Of money I had but a handful of florins, and he little more; but still enough to take us on the way.

"We waited in profound stillness until the street was clear in front, and the agents, deceived by the seemingly careless security of their victim, had crept home. We then went out by a back door which was *used by the servants*; who were all asleep, or at least

in their chambers. Unseen we reached a street corner, where a hired carriage was waiting, attended by the servant who always drove us—a faithful and sagacious man, one of *ourselves*, whom my nephew had instructed even before they had reached the palace. He drove—not too fast, lest suspicion should be excited—through the purlieus and by-ways of the city, and he manœuvred so well that we were out of Warsaw by daybreak. It was necessary to use our own name to secure passports until we crossed the frontier; we then changed our carriage and name at once, and travelled disguised as Austrians of the lower order. We never paused to sleep a single night, nor rested for a meal at an inn, until we reached the coast, where we embarked for England, whose white cliffs stretch out their strong arms of shelter to all the world.

"We hired two small rooms in a remote hamlet, and I let no one see my charge, who passed for an invalid requiring change of air. Directly we were settled my nephew went to London, leaving me all the money we had remaining, except what was barely enough for his journey. My poor child then first comprehended her position, and I very gently revealed to her the danger she had escaped. She did little else than weep until her brother's return.

"It was not until he reached London that he dared to address his friends abroad. Head and heart of *the patriotic* association he had ever been; and he

communicated with them by secret cipher. They answered in the same way; and he found that his intuition had not failed him: he had saved his sister's virtue, and the honour of her race—but by sacrificing all else.

"Early on the morning of our flight, the tyrant — incognito, but with his usual guard of spies within sight—had entered our house in Warsaw. The count was with him, and they searched the house together, even to the cellars and the vaults; for the house had been a prison. A troop was then despatched to search our country-house; which was well for us, as it gave us time. Distracted and desperate, the Grand Duke summoned our servants, and, surrounding them with soldiery, commanded them to confess where we had hidden ourselves. Our brave retainers, who declared, and with truth, their ignorance of our departure, were flung into dungeons; and one, who boldly asserted that if he had known he would not have confessed, was whipped through the streets of Warsaw! My nephew, who had great influence with one member of the Diet, lost no time in endeavouring, through him, to mitigate the sufferings of his old servants; and he eventually succeeded.

"But that was not all. When he returned from London to our retirement, he brought us the latest intelligence from his friends; the whole of his property was swept into the imperial coffers, his country *residence and estate* confiscated, his town house

stripped of its ancient furniture and burnt, his official post filled up, and a price set upon his person. His faithful colleagues secured a remnant of his valuable library, which his servants had hastily thrown into a chest and buried in one of the cellars; and this chest, after many delays, reached England."

"We have seen it often," I remarked, "and wondered why the clasps were rusty while the wood seemed nearly new."

George deprecated my interruption, I could see; he said nothing, however, and Miss Henry went on without looking towards me.

"His friends warned him that emissaries had been despatched to the chief European capitals, and besought him not to remain in the metropolis of England; which was, just then, most dangerous of all. It became, therefore, important to seek some means of subsistence away from any large city. London, or one of your universities, would have afforded the best field for the exercise of my nephew's talents, for he was master of the Oriental and European languages, a good mathematician, and not a mean artist. In an obscure country place I foresaw it would be very improbable he would find any suitable employment; but his forecast was clearer than mine.

"The postmaster of the nearest town was a shrewd though untaught person, and proved trustworthy; of him my nephew inquired the rank and means of the *different country* families. The man was acquainted

with the households of many, and the repute of all, — excepting one, and that the most ancient and important in the county. Of this last he spoke in terms mysterious yet reverential; its *ménage* was evidently beyond his scrutiny: he knew the name of the family, and the number and age of its inmates, that was all.

"Upon this slight information my nephew formed his plans; he sought and obtained an interview with the lord of the demesne. Through the goodness of that Providence which guides every footstep of the just, he found there everything he sought, and more than he had dared to hope for; permanent employment, an interesting charge, noble treatment, and generous remuneration. The nature of that recluse nobleman, so pure and so ascetic, induced my nephew to confide in him entirely; and that confidence he never repented. My lord, his benefactor was your brother!"

"And you were the 'interesting charge,' George," I remarked.

He did not notice my interruption; but exclaimed, with burning cheek and flashing eye, "You were not there all those years? You did not stay there,— and *she* so near me?"

"Our friend the postmaster," Miss Henry calmly resumed, "only remained in town for his duties; he had a cottage of his own, near a lonely highway, with a glen behind it, and hills all round. It was old-fashioned *and built of* wood, but very roomy; and as

he was not married, he was glad to let us have the upper part. It would have been impossible to find a more secure retreat, as it was only passed by the night and morning mails, or a wandering gipsy. Greatly to our advantage, also, it was but four miles from Ashleigh Place; and we saw our dear friend often,—once a week. The first two summers of our sojourn we frequently approached the gates, and Maya has gathered fir-apples that the wind had shaken over the wall. Soon, however, we left off walking near the grounds, for her brother feared that she might be seen.

"Our favourite ramble afterwards was the thyme-empurpled hill from whose summit we could gaze over the whole extent of the park, and look down upon the stone balustrade which surrounds the roof-walk of the mansion."

"That house shall be her home! Oh, grant it, Heaven!" George cried, with passionate emotion; and, as he spoke, he rose and crossed the room, taking a seat next to the narratress. She did not yet smile: I thought she sighed.

"You must now perceive," she said, "why her brother fears, rather than hopes, that she may find a home. She was then a simple, though earnest child; she is now a woman, not less earnest, but with full knowledge and ripened judgment. From a disposition naturally unselfish, suffering has purged *every selfish* impulse. She has lofty principle, deep

piety,—but pride unsubdued, and heroism which no sacrifice could daunt. She always understood, but has fully comprehended lately, that her brother had sacrificed *his* prospects for her sake.

"Within the last few months the patriotic association in Poland has acquired new strength, and fresh secret impulse. Its members still regard him; even rely upon his advice; his distant superintendence is their chief support in this country. He might now, were he unembarrassed with any worldy care, return to his country, and join—perhaps direct—that struggle for a sacred cause which is certainly rising again, and which, under his auspices, might be successful.

"As I have said, Maya knows all these things; and, in a moment of impassioned confidence, she declared to her brother that she would not refuse to marry any honourable man whose esteem she could reciprocate, in order to free him from that care of her in which he would not relax. Since that hour we have remained in greater privacy than ever: her brother will not even introduce to her his countrymen in London. In conclusion, I need scarcely say that it was my nephew's earnest desire that no communication might be established, however set on foot"—here she glanced awfully at implicated me!—"between his own family and that of the honoured and beloved friend who has been the source of his *happiness and prosperity*."

"I see—I understand," said George, in his sweetest voice; "but, I do not despair. I thought my master wise in all things; in this matter his pupil is wiser than he. He feels an unworthy mistrust of that divine gift called Love; which, though a human passion, is pure, and incompatible with falsehood. I know *she* could not act nor speak other than truly —she would not give herself where she was not loved; and whosoever loved her worthily would instruct her to love himself, albeit unworthy except in loving her! And this lesson of love I would teach her—and none but herself shall forbid me!"

Maya's aunt took off her spectacles; they were misty. She was not one to demonstrate emotion, but she was very visibly affected. So was that excitable person, George; who seized her hand, and kissed it. She recovered first, of course; and, in her old courtly style, she gave this invitation:

"My dear young lady, and my lord, I hope you will stay to dinner?"

"Dinner!" exclaimed George, whose feelings were shocked by this anti-climax. "Dinner, madam! eating would choke me! Let me see your niece, I entreat: see her I must, this moment. Only do not ask her permission; for she might refuse."

"She must wonder," I observed, "what this committee with closed doors means."

Her aunt quietly replied, "She is not curious."

"Madam," again exclaimed George, "I shall go

myself and seek her." He was rushing to the door, but Maria Theresa put forth her small hand and restrained him. He was afraid, as all men are, of tiny women—and remained. Then she left him, and went downstairs with me into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XV.

"COMPOSE yourself," Miss Henry observed, the moment the dining-room door was closed.

I did not know I was discomposed, so I looked in the glass to see; and, while my back was turned, Miss Henry rang the bell and told the maid to inform Miss Maya that Miss Reynolds was waiting to speak to her in the dining-room. Down came Maya, looking quite calm—too calm, I thought, for perfect innocence of the mysterious conference; and her deep blue eyes were dilated as she fixed them upon my countenance.

Assuming a forced calmness, I addressed her, and requested to speak a word to her alone. She turned aside and gazed, astonished, at her aunt. "Your aunt knows all about it, and permits it." I added, "I hope you will not refuse to let me accompany you upstairs; *I* will not detain you long."

Maya did not reply; she sank into a chair: but

I gave her no time to collect herself, and again urged my request. Her aunt at last came to my assistance, and said to her niece, "It is necessary that you should comply with your friend's request."

Maya rose, and passed out at the door, too proud to hesitate another instant. I did not pause either. On reaching the door of the drawing-room I opened it, and passed in before her: she followed. I directly named Lord Ailye. He rose, and blushed; but she turned pale, and seemed to grow taller as he bent before her. I saw and shared their embarrasment, so I abruptly left them together, only noticing that there was a lamp on the table between them.

On my rejoining Miss Henry in the dining-room, she made herself very agreeable; but much as an abbess might behave to a visitor in a mood of relaxation. She did not directly allude to what might be supposed to be going on overhead; but she told me a charming story or two about her and Maya's country sojourn in *our* days of ignorance: how Mr. Henry superintended Maya's studies, and educated her to the full as austerely as he did George at the same time; how his visits always took place on Saturday evenings, and were spent in reviewing past studies, and the imposition of fresh tasks for the week to come; how he had informed his aunt that we at Ashleigh were never permitted to walk outside the grounds and park, except to church; and, for *some mysterious* reason had forbade their attendance

at the church he attended with us, and directed that they should worship at a church two miles off in the opposite direction; how once Maya, having advanced near enough to the park gates to pluck a blue periwinkle from amongst the grass inside, was discerned with her arm thrust through the bars, by her brother, who was taking a solitary turn, and who ordered her, the next Saturday, never to approach the gates again.

But as time wore on—the *tête-à-tête* having lasted more than an hour and a half,—Miss Henry felt persuaded that Lord Ailye must be fainting for want of some refreshment: it was impossible that a young gentleman *could* have so much to say to a young lady during their first interview. Indeed, she looked rather exaltedly ashamed of the transaction. When *she* was a young woman, about the Austrian court, young gentlemen would have thought it an honour to be allowed one minute's conversation with a lady in private; and that not until after numerous public interviews. They might say—we English she meant —what they would of the licence of Continental circles, but there was none such as in England. Our manner was reserved, but our social usages were unveiled, unguarded. Not that she doubted the etiquette of Lord Ailye; but she feared her poor child would be pained by the prolongation of an interview under such circumstances. At last she requested, nay commanded, me to go upstairs, and bring them down *to dinner.* I steadfastly refused, and she rose

from her chair with the manifest intention of fetching them herself; when at that moment there was a knock at the street-door. My pulses rose, for I knew the knock, and the next minute Mr. Henry entered. His aunt sat down again, and I remained seated. On seeing me, he stopped short, "Miss Reynolds—you here?" "Yes," I answered, meekly intrepid, "and George is here, too; upstairs in the drawing-room with your sister."

I really repented my rashness, he turned so pale—unnecessarily so, I thought: having snatched a carafon of water, he drained its contents, and sat down as far from me as possible. He recovered his composure in a moment, and said,—"Let us dine: Miss Reynolds, to judge from her appearance, is quite exhausted."

Miss Henry, happy to have anything to do, ordered up the dinner; a repast not in British fashion, but in that of Very and Vefour. We all three ate very sparingly and in silence; that is, we trifled with one course, and refused the others. Miss Henry broke the silence by saying, "Do you not think that Lord Ailye must be very faint by this time?" This was to her nephew. "Has not his lordship dined?" inquired Mr. Henry. "I do not see that it is possible," Miss Henry added, sublimely spiteful, "for he has been here with this young lady three or four hours." "And how long with my sister?" Mr. Henry asked. "Two hours," she replied, "or more." "Suppose, *Mr. Henry,*" I suggested, "George should now take

the opportunity of revenging himself upon you for the length of time you kept him in ignorance of what detains him *now*."

This was more than he chose to bear. He rose and opened the door. "Where are you going?" cried his aunt; but he did not stop to answer. *I* knew, however, and followed him. He went upstairs, I followed still; and he did not turn to check me. On reaching the door of the drawing-room, Mr. Henry knocked. There was no response, nor was the door opened; nor was there any murmur of communing voices either. Mr. Henry waited very impatiently about the third part of a minute, and knocked again, louder and more imperatively. This time a very faint masculine voice was heard to utter, "Come in," in a tone that conveyed to me the impression that the permission was reluctantly yielded to necessity. Mr. Henry entered immediately, and I saw a proud curl of his lip subside into a smile of welcome. The lamp upon the table burned brightly, and at the window stood Maya alone, seeming taller and paler than ever, more delicate and more majestic; and alas! more proud. She was looking down, and did not lift her eyes as we entered. Upon the window-seat lay a lily of the valley, which I suppose she had flung down after George had presented it to her, for upon the table besides the lamp was placed a vase of those same lilies.

George stood in the extremest corner of the room,

as far from her as possible, leaning with his hands upon a chair in front of him; and certainly I could not have imagined that a human being could look so graceful under such awkward circumstances. He was looking full at Maya across the room, and his eyes seemed literally to flash a golden flame, while his bright hair was as a halo round his face, which glowed crimson. There was such a chaos of passionate expression in George's countenance, that although it fascinated me, I turned aside: rage and rapture, indignation and ecstasy, were mingled, and indicated that whatever he might have to fear, he was not altogether without hope.

I wanted Mr. Henry to observe all this, but he heeded neither George nor me, and walked up to Maya, standing so as to screen his sister from George's view. George, driven to extremity, crossed the room, and seized Mr. Henry's hand. "Let me speak to you, let me explain to you!" he cried.

"Not here—not now," replied Mr. Henry, in what may be termed his *ancestral* voice. "You are both exhausted for want of food—my sister is utterly so. It is nearly ten o'clock. May I request you, my lord, to lead her down to dinner?"

This polite request may sound cordially, but it was not pronounced so: a chill struck me, and George glanced at the speaker with proud deference. However, he offered his arm to Maya, and took her *downstairs*. Mr. Henry followed as I fancied: at

all events he followed them out of the room. I was in no mood to join the party; and feeling that I could endure suspense much better by myself, remained in the drawing-room. To my very great surprise, I heard some one enter a minute or two afterwards, while I was standing by the window, which I had opened for a little air; it was Mr. Henry himself, who, approaching, bade me sit down; which I was glad enough to do. Without waiting for him to speak, I began impetuously, "Mr. Henry, I hope —I trust, you are not angry; not very angry—it would be cruel!"

"With whom should I be angry, Miss Reynolds?" he inquired very calmly.

"With George—with me—with every one. But I assure you we had a very long conversation with Miss Henry—I mean the dowager—first."

"I am very glad to hear that—my aunt was highly honoured in her listeners, who evidently listened to some purpose. But what then?"

His cool manner made me feel more acutely than ever, and I burst into tears: a weakness I have never since yielded to in the presence of another.

"You have quite worn yourself out with all this excitement—about nothing too," said Mr. Henry.

"About nothing?" I cried indignantly. But I caught his expression—he was smiling. "About everything," I added; "everything in the world to *George. I suppose* love is, like the divine cause

greater than its whole effect: but nobody seems to feel anything except George and I."

"Come, that is a hard saying: it is scarcely fair to exclude the most grateful of these worshippers—the happiest, too."

"What can make you so contradictory, Mr. Henry? so cruel, too, I think. Your conduct and your words are at variance! You would not smile at George—no, nor look at him, where he stood all alone."

"The kindest thing to do in such a case was what I *did* then—to give him time to regain his composure."

"I do not see why you should be above showing sympathy with George. And, really, Miss Henry behaved much more kindly to me than she seemed to do to George."

"I hope so!" said Mr. Henry, again smiling: "for Lord Ailye is a gentleman!"

"Really, I do not comprehend. You must trust him so far."

"Not so far only—but to the very end," he replied, in his earnest tones. "But everything is good in *His time* only! How long is the twilight before the daybreak in the gentlest climates of the earth! It is only where the tropic heats force nature into premature fruition, that day succeeds night without those lovely shades. And how long is the bud in its unfolding! you cannot trace the deepening of the tints

from hour to hour. Above all, how long is life! short in comparison with eternity, but *long*, very long to those who really *live*."

I felt impressed by his solemnity, and therefore compelled myself to answer lightly.

"I still think you might have said a kind word before you sent them down to dinner,—to dinner! after such an interview."

"I am sure he will confess it was prudent of me. Did you not perceive how wearied they both looked? To my certain knowledge Lord Ailye has eaten nothing since the morning. You know, Miss Reynolds, when a devoted friendship between a lady and a gentleman ends in marriage, they do not mutually commit suicide by way of celebration. They eat, drink, and sleep, live in houses, and have incomes which they must regulate; and the best of them spare a portion of their happiness to the duties which, duly fulfilled, secure the happiness of others."

"Oh! I am now quite easy: I did not understand you. I only wished to know that you did not object."

"Object! nay, I would invoke every blessing of heaven upon the noble man who opened his free heart to the sister of the stranger, and would give her liberty in his love. Miss Reynolds, you have been under my tuition. I feel that this evening I bid adieu to that calm, bright episode of my existence with which you as well as your cousin George are

for ever associated. I say not with regret; for I *must* not regret."

"And you will plunge again into the turmoil," I added lightly, for I was anxious to find out what he meant to do.

"I hope so," he replied.

"But I hope too," I added, "that it will not be always turmoil, but that tranquillity will return."

"There is always satisfaction in duty, and when duty involves a great purpose, there is the highest pleasure too. Some natures can only conceive of happiness as another name for heaven—and I am one."

"You will return to Poland again soon, then," I observed, "and you will take your own name again. How glad your friends will be to see you!"

"Who told you I should return so soon? Your imagination outstrips mine. I hope I shall return one day. It would be soon to me if it were in ten years hence."

"If I were a man, I would help you; and though a woman, I would fain try to aid your cause."

"You would, indeed?" There was a dreamy sadness in his look and voice, very unlike his usual self.

His serene yet sparkling eyes were fixed upon my face. Alas! what melancholy and incommunicable secret did their penetrating glance convey? I *understood*, but what has not been uttered can never *find an echo*. Wholly unconscious until that instant

of what might have been my blissful, my exalted fate, my heart was wrung with despair—but for one moment only,—the next the pang was stifled by maiden pride. My spirit rose at first wildly, but was soon conquered by that control which I had learned from him to exert. He could not have seen the struggle, for it found no expression in voice or look: it remains with me only as a remembrance of the past.

CHAPTER XVI.

Miss Henry and George made dinner last a very long time, for the clock of the church in the next square pealed ten while still we lingered at the open window. I was recalled to a consideration of Lady Barres, who not only did not know where I was, but had probably sent an attendant to George's house to conduct me to her own. I hinted this to Mr. Henry, who went downstairs and reminded them of the hour. Up came Miss Henry and Maya immediately, George and his friend following directly after. I could see that George looked too happy to be calm, and Maya too beautiful not to be happy. Mr. Henry, for the first time for many, many years, remained to sleep at his *own home that night*; so, on the best of terms

with every other and ourselves, George and I departed.

We had to pass my cousin's house in order to reach that of Lady Barres, and as we drove in front of George's door we observed it to be standing wide open; there, by the light of the lamp, we discerned the forms of Burnett and of Savage, who, we imagined, were watching for me; but, on a second glance, Savage was seen holding Burnett's hand, with his powdered poll bent down over that member; a coach was drawn up at the door, the coachman being rolled up in his driving coat upon the box, asleep. Of course the actors in this little scene were too engrossed to observe us, though we were laughing at them. George remarked upon the close affinity of the sublime with the ridiculous.

"If you mean any allusion to yourself, George," I answered, "I do not see the analogy; for Miss Henry and you were in the opposite corner of the room."

"Ah! Bice," he replied, "they speak of crude grapes hanging *out* of reach; how sweet are the clusters that hang within reach, but which we dare not pluck, and dream not even of touching, though their fragrance charms the soul!"

"I am too tired to be philosophical, or I would try and remember what Mr. Henry and I have been descanting on. At all events, mine *alderliefest* cousin, *it is well you* are in so discreet a frame of mind; for

he denies that life is short, and ordains that courtship shall be long. You must not think of brushing the bloom from the grape, but wait patiently till the cluster is ripe, and falls into your hands."

"Dearest Beatrice, I am not presumptuous enough to anticipate a short affiance,—too short, I mean."

"What do you mean by short? six months?"

"Some days contain ages; happy years count, alas! they say, for days. Everything depends upon the next few weeks, you know."

"How the next few weeks?"

"Because town will be empty in a month, and it is necessary we should meet in *society*, however little we may mix in the gay world after she becomes my wife."

"I suppose then you will take her everywhere. I should not do so. You will have no time to cultivate each other's acquaintance."

"Beatrice, you are a lady—a white gipsy,—and might do anything peculiar without perhaps injuring your own cause. I am not so fortunate, and am a man. In delighting to honour those we love, we must act up to the standard of our station. We are not living in the desert."

We had by this time arrived at Lady Barres's. L'Estrange emerged from a room at hand, where she had *been sitting* up for me. She said Lady Barres *had retired to bed* early, indisposed, and desolated

with anxiety on my account. Lady Barres always gave out she was ill on any night for which she happened to have had no invitation. George returned home, and, I suppose, packed off Burnett and her cavalier on reaching his house; for they returned soon after I was in my room. Burnett had taken a fancy to attend upon me since our acquaintance had ripened into intimacy, and she came and knocked at my door. I allowed her to enter, and perceiving she had red eyes, I observed, carelessly, that I hoped Lady Barres would get rid of Savage when she was married. "I hope not, miss," sobbed Burnett, "for I have promised to take an interest in him."

"I am sorry to hear it," I remarked, "I think he is not worthy of you."

"Perhaps not as he *is*, miss; but though my Lord Normanville's men are not one of them under six foot, Mr. Savage would not put up with such coarse companions: you know, Miss Reynolds, he is very refined. But he has great hopes of being made house-steward on my lady's marriage; and in that case, miss, it would be an offer *above* me, and I should be wrong in refusing it. Besides, Miss Reynolds, L'Estrange is going to marry Lord Normanville's gentleman; so it would be very appropriate that I should marry Mr. Savage."

I felt certain Lady Barres would not promote her *pet; and that* L'Estrange would not marry this *English valet.* L'Estrange was devoid of feeling or

principle, but remarkable for cleverness,—indeed, a genius of her order. Lady Barres tyrannized over Burnett; but L'Estrange tyrannized over Lady Barres, and was the only person of whom Lady Barres stood in awe, being terrified at the idea of her going away. L'Estrange had lived with the Duchess of Ferrara for some years, and no other English lady had ever employed her. She was paid very high wages; she did no work but to whip the cream of millinery, and possessed herself of her lady's dresses after they had been worn once or twice,—sometimes, if she chose, before they had been worn at all. She sneered at Lady Barres' jewels, of which she kept the key. This female dignitary breakfasted and dined alone; she invited any friends she liked to sup in her own room, which was furnished like a boudoir. She drank as much wine as she wished, and was never quite herself when Lady Barres was going to a great party. On that account she always called her grand toilettes her "inspirations;" and, certainly, they merited her own epithet, ravishing.

She dressed hair exquisitely; her finger gave a graceful turn to the most impracticable tress, and every fold of a dress gave dignity under her touch; her fancy in ornament was ideal, and her invention of modes inexhaustible. I have said Lady Barres *kept to one style of* costume, which was the creation *of L'Estrange, who* varied it like a kaleidescope, or

the extempore modulations of an air by a skilful musician.

When L'Estrange was a little tipsy she was sweet tempered, and made Lady Barres look ravishing; but when displeased, she strewed infinitesimal revenges in every corner of her lady's dress, made Lady Barres' face look as if it were on one side by the arrangement of her hair, and placed violent colours in discordant juxtaposition, till she actually seemed a fright. Once when Lady Barres had refused her the loan of a bracelet she was going to wear herself, L'Estrange inserted a breadth of the coarsest mock lace into the back of a Mechlin robe which Lady Barres wore at a ball given by a royal duchess. Her ladyship was told of it by a kind friend before she had been there half an hour, and was obliged to sit down for the rest of the evening.

For all these reasons, I did not think L'Estrange would marry Lord Normanville's valet, whose only French attribute was his title. I chose not to say so to Burnett; but, for fun, I added, "I do not see, Burnett, why you should marry at all, seeing you are pretty comfortable here."

"Miss Reynolds" (energetically), "I would rather be a mad dog or a dead cat than an old maid."

"In that case there is nothing to be said, except that I hope Savage will make you a kind husband."

"*I hope* so, miss; but I think I would really *rather have an* unkind husband than none at all."

Her avowal was honest, certainly, and is a solution of the problem of many matrimonial engagements.

Next morning nothing particular happened, except that Lady Barres, deluded by George's attention to me, treated me with great distinction. She invited me to accompany her in a drive in the afternoon. I sat beside Rowena, Lady Barres alone occupying one seat, and Lord Normanville, on horseback, caracoled beside the carriage. But those levels of worn grass, and rows of toy-like trees, bordering glaring walks and railed-in roads, with lodge-gates and lamp-posts at intervals, liveries and equipages all trying to be different, equestrians aiming to look alike, all the routine of fashion which makes Hyde Park sombre even in sunshine, and, most of all, the absence of congenial company, combined to make the drive wearisome and unlovely.

Next day, to my delight, it rained, and I spent great part of it alone; but in the evening Lady Barres was amiable, and made me read Dante to her, that Lord Normanville, who was present, might think she understood Italian, which was not the case. She rallied me about George, but respectfully; she liked cousins to marry, as all selfish members of rich families do. Lady Barres had sent Lord Normanville away early, for she was careful never to let him see too much of her at once; and while she was talking *about* George, there came from him a card of *invitation to* a dance. I had not thought it possible

anything could be arranged so quickly; but I did not say so, and Lady Barres of course thought the party was made on my account, and had been settled weeks before. "The most ingenuous little person," she remarked, "had at length learned reserve upon the only point it signified should be guarded by discretion." Then she added that she was sure no other person could have persuaded George to give a ball; for he had not room enough, and he took an interest in politics, which always made men ashamed of dancing. I longed for this occasion to show her ladyship she was mistaken.

When the night arrived, the magnificent dreams of Lady Barres on my account led her to coax L'Estrange to dress my head, instead of Burnett, who generally assisted me to dress; and L'Estrange came, looking as black as thunder, and laid hold of me as if she were going to strangle me. When she had finished, which was in about a quarter of an hour, she swept out of the room; and on looking at myself I perceived that she had successfully imitated the ugliest effort of the English style at that date: huge, solid bows behind, and clammy curls in front. So I re-arranged my hair as I usually wore it.

Lord Normanville, who led Lady Barres, would have offered me his other arm if he had dared; as he did not, Hugh de Brabazone presented me with one *of his.* I may mention that this gentleman enjoyed a *monopoly of* certain seamless gloves he had invented

himself, which looked exactly like the cast of a hand; an artist had taken a model of that member for him, and his *gantier* kept it under a glass case to make his gloves from. Rowena was eager to have a pair of seamless gloves and a model of her hand; but at present their originator reserved them for himself; perhaps as a last resource.

The rooms of George's house looked beautiful; quite continental in their decoration. Coloured lamps hung on the walls in shapes of stars and wreaths, and rich lustres depended in streams of sparkling crystal from the ceiling, whose green and pink mouldings glittered with points of gold. There was beautiful music, the players not being visible; also a profusion of hothouse flowers, but the ventilation was so good that you breathed without that sense of suffocation which one would think from experience must be the prescribed atmosphere of assemblages in high society.

In those days quadrilles meant quadrilles, not a *pot pourri* of ladies and a stagnant mass of men; a dense congregation, which, instead of sitting still like other congregations, is divided into two forces deliberately striving one with the other for standing room. Nor in those days was the polka known: it was the fag end of a dynasty of fashion, immediately preceding the age of high pressure, and was in fact somewhat slow. Human beings, however, showed themselves much as they are now, except in their *dress; only* there were just enough persons present

to fill the rooms moderately, and not too many, for each one to see every other.

We arrived earlier than Lady Barres' usual habit; I suppose because she thought George would open the ball with me; however, though he told us, after greeting our arrival, that he had not yet danced, he did not offer to lead me out, but only gave me a kind and significant glance, and then left us. The next moment Maya entered with her aunt and brother. How beautiful she looked! Every one knows that the advent of a new beauty in a ball-room is, to the fashionable world, like the discovery of a planet to astronomers. But even a star must have a name, since Chaldean dreams are dead. The symmetrical figure of Maya, her perfect arms, her lustrous pale complexion, black hair, and eyes of intense blue, combined with the dignified simplicity of her toilette, and the majestic grace of her presence and movements, produced, as she appeared, a hush of breathless admiration, followed by whispered encomiums and inquiries. Delusive, however, was the hope that she might be spared what all must suffer in society without a name, unless they are known to conceal a great one!

George led her forward, having asked her to dance with him. I thought Lady Barres would sink into the earth: little I knew her. She had heard the names announced, but knowing Mr. Henry to be *nobody, she heard* as hearing not; and as for looking

to see what his relations were like, she would as soon have thought of scrutinizing a servant. Directly Maya and George stood up together, however, her ladyship charged her eyes with an intensely critical expression, which she levelled at Maya only. Still staring, she glided round the room, drawing Lord Normanville after her by keeping her fan on his arm, until she reached her friend the duchess, who was surveying the room as though it were an apartment in a doll's house. As my eyes followed Lady Barres, I perceived that every other person was staring at Maya too; but no longer with admiration: cold, supercilious glances gleamed from a hundred eyes whose scrutiny was insolent and cruel, though not exceeding the limits of conventional licence. Could it be envy, or was it only curiosity?

Whispers circling the room caught my ear on every side. "Who is she?"—"who is she?" hissed young men and fair women, dowagers and dandies; and the piquancy of the question consisted in nobody's being able to answer it. In these days men take with their eyes the measure of ladies' ankles, bet upon their fortunes, and discuss whether complexions be genuine when the fair are false. Now, ladies do not invariably ask whether men's fathers have been in trade. There are other social changes; have people ceased to lisp "who is she?"

Maya must have heard the snake-like sibilation, *but it pained* her not: it had no power upon

Her ingenuous and commanding countenance showed that she was at ease, occupied with her own thoughts, and unconscious of giving or taking offence. Her dancing was exquisite for the grace and harmony of her movements, which nymph-like sprang from the elastic step of her small and slender feet—a charm far rarer than the most beautiful of hands.

George did not dance gracefully—few men do of strictly Anglo-Norman descent; but he looked in a state of blissful world-disdaining triumph.

Meanwhile, I remarked that Lady Barres, like a steamer towing a hulk, had drawn the duchess onward, Lord Normanville moving after them in due course, until they anchored close to Maya's friends. I too wished to join them, but scarcely dared; now, however, the way was clear, for it was proper that I should follow my guardian, even though she had forgotten me. I reached the sofa whereon the elder Miss Henry sat, and crept behind it, while Mr. Henry stood beside his aunt. She wore brocade of deep blue, trimmed with the costliest white fur; and her silver white hair, dressed high upon her head and frizzled, gave to her complexion all the brilliancy of powder.

Mr. Henry's eyes did not follow his sister; perhaps he could not bear to do so, while yet her social fate was trembling in the balance.

Lady Barres placed herself, or fell into a seat at *his elbow, so close* that she could have touched it

with her fan; but she looked as if she were quite unconscious of his being near to her. Next to her, of course, Lord Normanville posted himself, the duchess being seated beside him; so that Lady Barres was not too far from her noble friend to talk to her, though she *was* too far to whisper: as lofty ladies may, and do, into each others' ears, though lowly school-children may not. However, here was no whispering, but the ring of full sweet English voices, clear as musical bells.

"I cannot imagine," was her ladyship's first remark, "with what hallucination my fine young cousin is seized to-night—the most important of his existence, in some respects. It is, as your grace is aware, the first ball he has given."

"And a pretty thing it is, though small—a very sparkling little affair. If only his lordship had consulted you, dear Lady Barres, he would have taken a high place, and have avoided the scrape he has got himself into. Perhaps, as it is his first essay, this escapade may be overlooked."

"There is no precedent for such inconceivable absurdity; and therefore perhaps as an eccentricity, a touch of orginality now and then excuses a freak. No, it is not my cousin I reprimand. There is in the bonnet of the Gordons the bee that buzzes in all Scotchmen's ears: Lord Ailye's mother was a *Gordon, and the* late Lord Ailye, as you know, never *went into* society. Therefore, as I said, I do not

blame my cousin; but I denounce the vulgar ing
titude of the unknown person who could impose u
his generosity—upon his boyish impetuosity—
avail himself of the opportunity which his positio
Lord Ailye's service gave him to better himself
thrusting forward his connections for their advant
and his own benefit."

"What name did they say?" asked the duch
following Maya with her glass. "Henry! Bu
cannot be Henry—there is an excellent Irish stock
that name."

"Pray do not foist them upon the protection
poor vice-royalty," replied Lady Barres, with a
laugh. "The name is not Henry, nor any other t
any one has ever heard of: it is an alias. The peo
who assume it, however, unfortunately for th
credentials, chose one most likely to betray their s
need of its shelter. Poor persons, however,
ought, perhaps, never to blame; for poverty is no
crime, any more than namelessness."

"How then," asked the duchess, in a hard haug
tone, "did they contrive to get here—to be as
as I suppose they were?"

"The girl is pretty," returned Lady Barres;
charming savage in a civilized crowd: she is
simple to know her place. I doubt not her beauty
the whole capital of her needy relations; and t
have speculated in it too rashly for success. W
my cousin's ear is gained, he will indiscrimin

grant any favour: and to gain the ear of a youth who has scarcely tasted life, we all know is easy. It is only for an elder person, one who affects wisdom because he has passed years in obscurity,—to whisper of beauty yet unseen, and graft imaginary charms on a slight reality."

"You doubt her beauty then!—For my part, I had scarcely seen her: but those massive marble outlines I dislike, and the unnaturally large eyes which stare and roll so."

"Marble!" exclaimed Lady Barres as the duchess made this remark. "Marble! oh, my dear creature, do not calumniate the charm of statuary—those classic forms which only the rarest symmetry can emulate. That complexion yonder is frightful; it is the sallow white, which passes for delicate pale only by lamplight. One does not meet with it amongst the English women, so it imposes here; but abroad, is common among the *bourgeoisie*, and it is the type of the ballet."

What will be thought of Lord Normanville, that he, an old soldier, could stand between two ladies, and hear them so speak of a third? But beyond the very first sentence or two of this insolent dialogue, Lord Normanville heard nothing; for just at that moment, the quadrille being over, George led Maya to a seat and leaving her for an instant, crossed the room and spoke to Lord Normanville, who smiled and followed George, bowing to Lady Barres as he left

her side. Of course she could not ask where his lordship was going, nor follow him. When I beheld what George did, I scarcely marvelled that she spoke so bitterly; for George had presented Lord Normanville to Maya. Beautifully, and in a manner worthy of his fine sense and tact, did Lord Normanville behave; he stood while Maya sat, and talked to her with perfect ease of high breeding, without the least air of supposed superiority.

Lady Barres must have felt that Lord Normanville was compromising his dignity. She saw not with her bodily eyes: those well-disciplined orbs never glanced across the room once; neither did she alter her voice, her manner, or the matter of her discourse; though had he been listening, she would not have gone so far. She knew that Mr. Henry and his aunt heard every syllable she uttered, as she intended: and she also guessed rightly that they would not repeat her slanders; though she could not think that they would be forgotten, as such harmless scandal should be. Mr. Henry looked, if anything, rather amused than disconcerted; and as for old Miss Henry, she lay back upon the sofa with that aspect of serenity which is the best becoming passive state in good society.

In about five minutes after Lord Normanville had left our corner—for in five minutes many spiteful things can be said,—he returned to his old place, there being *still room left for* him; and he forthwith began

speaking to Lady Barres. I gathered from his countenance that he was resorting to every phase of insinuation, deprecation, and entreaty. Her ladyship dared not displease him, for the morning twilight of her affiance approximated to bridal dawn; and it was sweet to her to please those she loved. At last she bowed, and negligently unfolding her fan, she screened her face with it as though she would escape observation, while she nerved herself for a sublime act of sacrifice. In another moment Maya was presented to Lady Barres, who looked perfectly impassive, and, in a tone of utter indifference, said that she was happy to make her acquaintance. How they would have got on together afterwards I cannot tell; but Mr. Henry, not choosing to subject his sister to the possibility of insolent politeness, looked at his aunt, who rose with great presence, and in another moment the three had left the ball-room.

The gentlemen were ready to bite off the ends of their gloves with vexation; for there was scarcely one present who would not have given ten pounds (why should it be vulgar to mention the motive power that sways mankind?) to purchase the pleasure of dancing a quadrille with Maya. It was the more tantalising, for she had danced once, and no one could imagine she went away early because she was fatigued. Fresh beauty had invested her, in the eyes of the men, every instant that she remained in the room; blushes suffused her cheeks, and lent a new

charm to her beauty, while the heavenly blue of her eyes beamed brighter with excitement. But her last glance and step as she retired, indicated the deep-seated peace which belongs to a loftier triumph than that of admired, unrivalled beauty. George, in the finest spirits, not excited but buoyant, soon renewed the sparkle of the scene. After the momentary relapse, his gaiety of heart awakened the sympathy of his friends, and enlivened the whole company. At supper he was dazzling, and he told me afterwards he was surprised at his own cleverness, for he extemporised a *macaroni* song, quite beyond the average of extempore verses, in which he complimented almost every lady present.

Next morning, as in duty bound, he called upon Lady Barres, choosing the hour when she was out; for she just now aired herself daily. He saw me only, therefore; but I merely told him what she had said about Maya's complexion, and said nothing about "needy relations," for George would, I knew, have resented that impertinence. He was glowing with satisfaction and observed, "The next time she is seen it shall be in full daylight."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next time George called, he looked as if he had been blissfully engaged in the meanwhile, for he was radiant with delight. We were all at home, Lord Normanville having gone into the country to one of his places to see that it was ready to receive his bride by the middle of the next month. Lady Barres was softly sulky, because L'Estrange had required her salary to be doubled when her mistress became Lady Normanville. George had brought her a basket of orchids, which were just then a slight rage, and they had a soothing effect, for she prized flowers only for their rarity. He conciliated her further by praising a ring—a blue diamond, surrounded by black pearls,—which Lord Normanville had given her the day before; and finished by inviting her to a rural fête. Knowing she detested daylight entertainments and every variety of out-door festivities, I was not surprised that she shook her head and begged George to excuse her, as she had not nerve for the stimulus of an entertainment in the open air. George smiled, but did not look baffled; he only observed, that when Lady Barres knew whither he intended to assemble his friends, she

would not persist in her objection. It was to the Villarosa.

Villarosa! certainly that made a difference. It had been the cynosure of fashionable curiosity for several seasons, and a goal never reached by the most adventurous. Lady Barres said she would consider of it; and, at all events, she would take a peep at the charming festivity, even if she could not stay to share it. She dared not ask George how he had obtained the entrée where all others had failed, and he did not choose to tell her just then.

"I hope you intend to honour Lord Normanville with an invitation," observed Lady Barres.

"I should wish to do so, certainly; but I came here first," George answered.

"I will convey to him your kind invitation, and persuade him to accept it. He scarcely opens half his notes of invitation, and I would not have this escape him."

George bowed and assented. What else could he do? Lady Barres reiterated, "Do not send him a note,—he will never read it," so earnestly, that George was surprised at her persistence in such a trifling matter.

"But," added her ladyship, "how shall we meet you?"

George explained that there would be pleasure boats; whereupon she said she could not go upon the *river, because* the smells reached beyond Richmond:

and also she was in the habit of fainting on calm water, though she thought a sail in a yacht on a breezy day "divine." Therefore she would take "the overland route" in her carriage, and bring Lord Normanville, with Rowena and Hugh de Brabazone. As for "the talented little person," she would send her, under safe escort, to join the boats. I wondered at her kindness to me, until I remembered there was only room for four in the carriage.

Villarosa was the pretty foreign name by which a quaint old English house, secluded in its grounds upon the banks of the river, had been rebaptized. It was untenanted for several years before its present mysterious occupant had entered upon possession. No one knew who inhabited it, and all that could be perceived was the dazzling beauty of the flower-garden seen from the river at some distance. A near view from the water showed only three terraces, one above the other, which had been newly raised on the foundation of the old sloping banks. Nobody could land at the steps of the lowest terrace, as there was a locked water-gate, and the lower balustrades were too high to climb; and no person ever passed the gates of the grounds from the road. Lady Barres, among other persons, was so curious to know who lived at Villarosa that she would have gone in the pouring rain. Of course she did not ask whether *Maya was going*; for had she been told so, she

would have been obliged to refuse, for the sake of appearances.

We saw George again before the morning of the pleasure party, and he told me he had asked everybody he knew, but that he could not get enough: he wished to have as many guests as possible; for, said he, "I would not have my real motive suspected, even by *her*." I bethought myself of some faces that would enliven a November fog, and asked permission to call for the Thynnes as we passed Richmond. George was delighted, being amiable enough to wish to show them attention because they had been kind to me.

I wrote to Mrs. Thynne, inviting her also. She returned me an answer which, ill-spelt as it was, I admired. She would be very proud for her girls to go, but as for herself she knew her place too well to make herself "conspicuus" amongst people of fashion and education. Then in a modest postscript, written very small, crept the request, might Thynne Thynne come too? he was at home for the long vacation. A certain young lady need not be afraid; for she, his mamma, would take care he should have neither pencil nor paper in his pocket: evidently his sisters had told her that I did not like his verses. Of course I wrote and said my cousin would be happy to see him.

The day arrived and was splendid; the atmosphere *clear and mellow*, as in Spain, with no clouds, and

scarcely a breeze, only a gentle breath from the south now and then. Our procession was quite a pageant; there were three beautiful shallops filled with guests,—the host of course in the first,—the rowers in bright new liveries; a band of musicians followed in a fourth boat, and a train of servants in a fifth: the sixth had preceded us to make preparations for the company. Mr. Henry was in the second boat; I had a place in the first, where also sat Maya and her aunt; and to my great satisfaction, I found room next Maya, who sat near the stern, George himself taking the helm.

At Richmond the Thynnes were waiting; their mother stood on the top of the steps to see them embark, and kissed her hand and nodded to me all the while we were in sight. The girls took up a good deal of room, for they all wore wide straw hats lined with green silk, with green bows and streamers: they had no parasols, which indeed their immense hats rendered unnecessary. Thynne Thynne, who carried a boat-cloak with tassels, over his arm, contrived to get into our boat; but if any flutter of vanity had fanned my spirit it would have been instantly calmed by seeing him look at Maya: he seemed transfixed, and gazed with the rigid stare of admiration peculiar to his poetical moments. Maya was amused, and turned her head aside to smile, but then she met George's eye and was obliged to look *the other way*. She wore a white pelisse with ribbons

of rose-colour, and a bonnet simply trimmed with white, and she carried a green parasol: I mention the parasol because it played a part on that day. I tried to engage Thynne Thynne in conversation, but he only gazed at me with a rapt expression, and besought me, quite loud enough for Maya to hear, to tell him who she was. I replied in a significant but low tone that she was the sister of my cousin Lord Ailye's dearest friend; whereat he heaved a sigh, and leaned over the side of the boat with his hair hanging into his eyes, until we reached the shore.

The water gate was open; George sprang out first and handed every lady from the boats, and we ascended a noble flight of steps from the water to the first terrace, and thence to the second and third. The third terrace was magnificent; it was bordered by pierced stone carving, and upon the balustrade peacocks proudly trod, at intervals unfurling their lustrous fans to the glowing sun. Then the garden burst upon us, a smooth lawn of the finest and most elastic turf and the freshest verdure, laid out with beds and baskets of the brightest flowers, which also bloomed in vases; and trellises of various forms were covered with roses, white, yellow, crimson, and purple. On one side of the lawn a range of hothouses showed a blaze of tropical plants, glowing like jewels through the glass; on the other, dark masses of cedar, cypress and yew, formed a solemn grove, whose shade no sun could penetrate. A path beyond the terrace avoided

the grove, and wound amid undulations of grassy slopes, studded with beautiful trees.

George led his guests to a spot indicated by the white canvass and tent-poles of marquees, whose flags lazily drooped in the warm air. The dainty tresses of silver birch and rose acacia flecked the bright greensward with softest shadows, and a grand old oak in the centre of the turf cast a deep and welcome cool; the rose garlands and knots of ribbon which hung from its rugged limbs forming a gay contrast to its bronze foliage and the sunny grass around.

There were two large marquees; the one arranged for the guests formed an immense semicircle, so that no one should immediately face another, yet each could see the array of smiling faces. The tent-poles were enwreathed with flowers and ribbons, and the tables were spread with snowy damask, set out with rich china and crystal in profusion, relieved by bouquets of choice flowers placed beside every cover. A jet of perfumed water plashed in the centre, playing from a crystal basin, beneath which was concealed by flowers a German music-box which played a variety of airs, in those soft, sparkling, tiny tones that interrupt conversation no more than the hum of a bee.

Before we entered the tent, a carriage was seen in the distance, which dashed through the open gate of the grounds, nearly overturning the tent that held the servants, and finally drew up upon the grass, the greys prancing and foaming as though conscious of

being out of their places. George sprang forward, and handed out Lady Barres. No Lord Normanville sat beside her, only the inevitable duchess, looking black as Hades. Rowena, sun-flushed and sulky, was handed out after the elder ladies, and Hugh de Brabazone followed with a burning face: indeed it was so hot that I could not conceive of any motive less strong than curiosity inducing the duchess and Lady Barres to venture on a drive on such an afternoon. But where was Lord Normanville? Lady Barres, (who looked cool as an Undine in a grotto,) said courteously, that to his great regret and hers he could not be present, having to fulfil a previously settled engagement elsewhere; she had therefore determined to come herself, although really the heat, &c. &c. Yes, thought I, you have come, and made him stay away, because you want to do something you would not dare to do if he were here.

A place had been reserved for the duchess in the place of honour in the centre of the crescent, and she enthroned herself immediately; but Lady Barres, whom George was to have separated from her grace, assumed one of her gentle airs of exhaustion, and holding up her milk-white fingers deprecated that seat above all others: she really *should* faint if she had to sit so far from the opening; the scent of all those flowers, and the intense perfume of the fruit, would be too much for her.

In short, she was determined to sit at one end of

the half circle, close to the opening; "exactly opposite her charming Beatrice," she added: keeping, meantime, everybody on their feet. She would resign the seat of honour to some younger and fairer guest, who would do her cousin the kindness to sit next him. She sank into the seat she had indicated, and beckoned Savage, who had been simmering in the background, to come and attend upon her; which was quite unnecessary, as the attendance was numerous and most efficient. George, in blissful ignorance of Lady Barres' designs, won Maya to take the seat next himself; and certainly no two human beings ever looked more radiant with beauty and felicity than this noble pair.

Immediately we were all seated, Lady Barres put up her glass, set with emeralds, which attracted all eyes by their sparkle, and through it deliberately scrutinized the whole company in succession, bowing and smiling to every individual, whether known to her by name or not, until she reached Mr. Henry who was sitting between two of the Thynnes; she bowed and smiled to one Thynne, then dropped her glass in Mr. Henry's face, and took it up again to examine the other Thynne, at whom also she bowed and smiled. Then she began at the end of the table where she was seated, passed in review the faces near her jewelled glass, with the accompaniments of smiles and compliments, till she reached Miss Henry the elder; again her glass fell in Miss Henry's face, and

again she raised it to her eye until she perceived Maya, now seated next to George; then for the third time it was dashed down, shaking the shining links of the chain by which it was suspended, and, passing over Maya, Lady Barres spoke to George. From that moment she continued to engross his attention; he being obliged, by courtesy, to listen to her, and to answer her: she allowed him not an instant to address Maya, and he had the prudence not to endeavour to do so, though he kept her supplied with successive delicacies.

Lady Barres, in short, would have placed the reputation of any young host with less tact and spirit than George, in jeopardy; but she could not succeed here, for Mr. Henry was regent of the entertainment, and exercised his power with magical skill. The voyage had been long, the day was warm, and every one was hungry or thirsty. For the hungry there were indescribable preparations of fish, flesh, and fowl, including even hot dishes—for a French cook presided at a stove in the second tent; for the thirsty there were peaches and pineapples, grapes and melons, fresh and juicy as from Pomona's lap; ice, crystal clear, and cold, though on a hot day, and at a period before the Wenham Lake had been made to supply London tables; also French, German, and Italian wines. Lady Barres tasted of several dishes — Savage being occupied in changing her plates—and *sipped a few* glasses of wine; then she unfurled a

huge fan, which she kept in constant motion, still talking to George, and showering insignificant but clever remarks amongst the guests; but she never looked at Maya any more than if she had been a blank of blue sky: Lady Barres never looked at the sky. The duchess was engrossed by the enjoyment of the delicacies that tempted and even satisfied her fastidious palate; she told George that the collation would have been faultless if only there had been prawns: she always desired to taste prawns upon occasions when it would not be vulgar to do so; why were there none to-day?

I could not sufficiently admire Maya, who behaved beautifully in this trying situation; for though she thought proper to be silent, and only bowed when spoken to, her silence was neither resentful nor ungracious. She now and then exchanged a smile with George, and no one present could have failed to detect a mutual confidence between them; but there was no blushing bashful betrayal of a secret understanding; *they* knew how to keep their secret.

Suddenly a peacock strutted round the corner of the tent, and swept, with trailing plumes, to the back of the table, between the seats and the lining of the tent. It was towards the end of the feast, and every one offered the beautiful bird something; but all their scraps he disdainfully eschewed, until Maya held him out a piece of bread, which he greedily devoured. He had scarcely swallowed it when a

beautiful carrier pigeon flew into the tent and perched on Maya's wrist as she fed the peacock; then followed a snow-white Italian greyhound, which had bounded back from the entrance twenty times, but at last darted under the table and climbed up into Maya's lap. One of the servants of the house—for the owner had placed her staff at George's disposal—told us that it was near feeding-time, when all the birds and "creatures" were let out first for exercise. They would none of them be tamed, added the man, and would only allow their mistress who fed them to touch them with her hand; they fled from all others: yet now they fled to a strange lady and let her feed them!

Then burst forth the universal, "Who and what was the mistress of the place?—for now they knew it to be a lady, they *must* know all: Lord Ailye of course could tell them?" The old servant fell back, looking impenetrable, and George bowed, looking more impenetrable still. "I am sure," he observed, "not one of my friends would wish me to break a bond of secrecy between myself and the proprietor of this fair place. It is enough that permission is freely granted us to inspect the house and grounds—the first party who have ever done so."

The carrier-pigeon was still picking crumbs from Maya's lily hand, when a monkey, dressed in an Oriental costume, with its light silver chain broken off short, sprang upon the table. "Friar Rush!

Friar Rush!" cried the servant, darting forwards; but Friar Rush effected a razzia among the dainties, smashed the glass and china in his course, and, seizing hold of a melon, flung it in the face of the servant with so true an aim that the man staggered. Now it happened that Lady Barres had put her parasol in the corner of the sofa next her, with its ivory handle of Chinese carving uppermost; Friar Rush, perceiving he was in danger of being caught, and perhaps attracted by the rose-coloured tassel of the parasol, snatched it up, and ran off with it. The men pursued him, of course; but he was in a moment out of sight, having dashed into the middle of the funereal grove. Several of the gentlemen now rose, for Lady Barres looked stern as a stone: her face stiffened with anger. The Thynnes, of course, were eager to go and see what the monkey would do, so also was I. On reaching the lawn, we caught sight of Friar Rush scampering over the rose-beds, with Savage after him; then we lost sight of him for some moments, and when next he appeared it was upon the balustrade of a terrace before the house, walking slowly and with great pride holding the parasol open over his head, his tail curling gracefully beneath his oriental robe. Savage sprang upon the parapet, and the monkey allowed himself to be caught, but first shut the parasol and dropped it into a well at the foot of the terrace. The well being prettily overhung with maidenhair, we thought the parasol

might only be entangled; but, when we came to look for it, it was embroidered with cobwebs and reeking wet, a thing Lady Barres would not suffer in her sight.

On returning to the tents we found all the rest of the party ready to disperse; a stroll through the grounds having been proposed. I explained to Lady Barres the fate of her parasol, in low tones, but she repeated the interesting history aloud to every one. It did not signify in the least, she observed, with a sweet smile; she never burned in the sun, and loved his beams: it was like dear Italy, where soon she hoped to be again, away from this false England, where even the sunshine was not pure, but strained through mist and filtered through fog. While her ladyship turned this imaginative sentence, I observed that George whispered to Maya, who smiled and put her green parasol into his hand. For the moment they were standing behind Lady Barres, who did not observe the little manœuvre; then George came forwards and offered Lady Barres his arm, leading her first out of the tent, but keeping his other hand behind him, still holding Maya's parasol.

It was one of those days that only happen in harvest-time, when the sunshine grows hotter and hotter, until just before the orb sinks below the horizon. When we reached the terrace the glare was burning, the heat being reflected from white stone and red gravel, while the sun's rays poured down fiercely from a cloudless sky. Lady Barres

was really of a delicate habit, and she wore one of L'Estrange's most ideal bonnets, a froth of *tulle*, through which, as Thynne Thynne might have expressed it, "the sunbeams *soaked* into her head." She paused and clung to George's arm, now really faint. "Ah, Lady Barres," said he, "what elf of the turf would not turn an oak-leaf into a parasol for you? See, here is one!" and he opened Maya's and held it over her ladyship, to her great relief. "But to whom," she asked, when recovered, "am I indebted for such a comfort as a real country parasol? No doubt to one of my kind young ladies from Richmond—however, do *not* tell me, Lord Ailye, for I should be obliged to restore it, and I do really think I want it more than the owner does."

I heard this as I was walking with Maya, just behind them, having drawn her on that we might hear what George would say. "Indeed, Lady Barres, you are right," he replied, in laughing tones; "the lady who lent it me is impervious to atmospheric influences. You will excuse my being explicit as to her name." She then began pestering him about the lady of the house.

At this moment, Mr. Henry, rather flushed, joined his sister and me, and on Maya inquiring where he had been—"With the lady of the house," said he, "to ask permission to show my friend and my sister something beautiful and strange, which must not be seen by the crowd."

"With the lady herself, Mr. Henry! It is well Lady Barres did not hear you say so; she is teazing George again about it, and she would desert him for you if she knew."

"But I could not take her ladyship if I would. I have the key here"—showing one of a Bramah's lock. "You ladies are not curious?"

"I am not," said Maya.

"Why will she let *us* go where others may not?"

"Because she has perfect confidence in Lord Ailye."

We entered the solemn grove, and the path became so narrow that we had to walk one by one; presently we reached a small building of rough stone with a black oaken door, which Mr. Henry unlocked. At first I thought it was a tiny sanctuary, but there was no altar; it was a monumental shrine—a tomb. There were narrow lancet apertures in the thick walls, through which the softened light fell upon two marble recumbent figures of Chantrey's finest chiselling. One, that of a youthful man with a heavenly countenance, seemed to *sleep* in death: the eyelids were not sunken, but full and soft, and the lips smiled. The robe of this figure was strewn with water-lilies wrought from alabaster, and round the margin of the robe was sculptured, "He walked on the water, to go to Jesus."

The other figure was of a woman, not asleep; her eyes were open and upturned, her lips almost seemed

to move, and her hands, exquisitely formed, were raised and folded together as in prayer. Every lineament expressed prayer for release; but there were no words sculptured on her robe, nor any other inscription upon the base of the monument.

"This is the figure of the lady of the house," observed Mr. Henry; "she had it sculptured so, beside her lost husband, praying to rejoin him. His fate was strangely sad. He was a sleep-walker; but his wife, not knowing it, had taken no precaution. Six months after their marriage he left her side one night, passed out of the house, walked across the garden, fell into the river from the bank, and was drowned. His widowed partner soothed her grief by cherishing his memory. She caused this monument to be erected, and enriched and beautified every spot where he had lived with her; but she never made acquaintance afterwards, though sometimes she has ventured abroad. It was on one of those occasions Lord Ailye met her."

"But who was she before she married?" I inquired.

"The daughter of an English family in Rome. Her father entered into a second marriage with a Catholic lady who had grown-up daughters, and who contrived to secrete her step-daughter in a convent during her father's absence; telling him, on his return, that his child had chosen her fate. A young Italian gentleman who was attached to the intended

nun, though he had not found an opportunity of openly declaring his devotion, took care to be present at the ceremony of her taking the veil; hoping she would see him, and that his presence might induce her to reject the vows. It had the desired effect: the novice refused to take the veil; her family would not receive her, and her place in society was lost, as is the custom in such cases. She married her lover, who was rich, and brought her to England; and as this place suited them, from its loneliness, they bought it. That is all I know."

"How disappointing all social mysteries are when cleared up. Who could have thought so romantic a story could be reduced to such matter-of-fact incidents!"

"Miss Reynolds, you are unreasonable. Should I have invented others to please you?"

Maya looked excited and dissatisfied: her pale cheek flushed. "We have not heard all," she said, "we have not heard—"

"How Lord Ailye made the lady's acquaintance?" said Mr. Henry, as she paused. "Miss Reynolds did not think of that!"

"No," said I, without reflection, "I thought that *you* had made her acquaintance, not George."

Mr. Henry smiled upon my self-betraying blunder, which I was conscious of even as it passed my lips.

"The story is short, and the end should be *shorter*," he added. "You know the chaplain of

—— Inn, of whom your cousin, Lord Ailye, thinks so highly. One Sunday this spring we saw a lady at church whom we had never observed before; she was still young and very fair, but bent and bowed, and dressed like an older person than she looked. As we went out after service we saw her standing pale and perplexed in the road, near an invalid chair, where no attendant was in waiting. Lord Ailye inquired whether he could assist her. She answered, timidly and in a very sweet voice, that she was seldom in town, and had only come the day before, wishing to hear Mr. —— preach; adding, that the servant who had drawn the chair that morning had left it standing in the road, and had gone away, taking her purse. We were rather astonished when she showed us a pocket in the lining of the chair, where she was in the habit of putting her purse; but she explained that she had been used to a faithful old servant who had lately died: and it was evident that she had lived too much alone to be on her guard against town knavery. She could not walk, and Lord Ailye had not his carriage at hand—can you guess what he did?"

"Drew the chair himself," I suggested: "I should have done so."

"But," inquired Maya, looking at her brother, "did not you help Lord Ailye?"

"I tried to do so, Maya. I pushed the chair be*hind, and* would have drawn it; but Lord Ailye,

whose arm is strong though he is so delicate, pushed me aside. I must confess I felt proud that my pupil should show such an example to gentlemen of his age."

I did not see anything very exalted or heroic in George's drawing a lady's invalid chair a little distance, when her footman had run off with her purse; but Maya and Mr. Henry seemed lost in admiration: I suppose because George was English; for I fear they did not think very highly of Englishmen in general. It was of course quite explicable now why the lady should have given George the *entrée* of her beautiful solitude.

To return to the parasol. By the time we three reached the terrace after leaving the grove, several of the company were walking there, others on the lawn and among the aviaries. Lady Barres was upon the terrace, still detaining George; and by his lofty expression and her insinuating manner, I could see that she had been giving him advice. As we mounted the terrace steps, she caught sight of Maya, walking without a parasol. I took care to hold mine up that she might perceive that it was to Maya she had been indebted.

Her ladyship turned a colour somewhat of the same hue, though paler than the parasol, which she shut up; then waiting till we were at the top of the steps, she handed it to Maya, who did not at first *understand* why it was returned to her. "I do not

require it," said Maya, simply; "and I hope your ladyship will be pleased to use it still: I am happy I had it with me." Lady Barres did not bend nor turn her head, but dropped the parasol, which fell down the terrace steps; Thynne Thynne snatched it up and carried it away.

Lady Barres beckoned the duchess to her. "We will go now," she said, "the day has been far too long already. Where is that child Rowena?" Now Rowena and Hugh de Brabazone were just then gazing on the prospect from the top of the house, and Lady Barres, in high dudgeon, would not wait for them to be fetched: she said Miss Vaux could return with Miss Reynolds in the evening. George was of course obliged to escort his two distinguished guests to their carriage, and their departure was as welcome to him as to us, though he did not show it.

We now rambled over the house, only a corner of which its mistress really occupied. There were curiosities in abundance; one room was hung with feathers; a small gallery of Italian pictures boasted a sew gems of art; a state bed-chamber contained a bed in which a king had slept, the quilt being embroidered with needlework with the royal arms in the middle, surrounded by medallions of George the Third's children, looking all alike, and resembling pumpkins cut into human profiles.

When George returned, he told us he had found *Savage and the* coachman sitting in the unhorsed

carriage, the former eating lobster salad with a spoon, the latter scooping out a melon, with the aid of a lump of sugar, and a champagne bottle between them.

Of course George persisted that Lady Barres had gone off in a huff because he would not tell her about the lady of the house—he did not allude to the parasol. After a refreshment of coffee, cream, and sillabub, the boats were rowed up to the steps; and while the guests embarked the musicians played "God save the King" as if the fine old tune were tipsy. Presently Thynne Thynne, who had been missing all the evening, appeared running, hot and dusty, holding Maya's parasol open, but inverted. He presented it to her filled with forget-me-nots, which he had been gathering on the banks of the river—mud, roots, and flowers altogether; but no sooner had the poet been landed at Richmond than George threw the parasol into the river, breaking the reflex of the harvest moon into a thousand golden sparkles as he flung it disdainfully away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HAVING some slight influence over Lord Normanville, I resolved to employ it for the purpose of revenge—not maliciously, but with righteous indignation. When he called next time I ensconced myself in the dining-room, and crossed the hall as he came downstairs; as if by accident, of course. I told him I was very sorry we had not the pleasure of his company at Villarosa, where we passed a very pleasant day. His start and puzzled expression convinced me that, as I suspected, he had never received his invitation from Lady Barres.

A day or two afterwards, I wrote his lordship a note, which I forbade him to show to anybody, asking a favour such as I could have only ventured to request of two or three persons. It was that he would invite Miss Henry, with her aunt and brother, to dinner, to meet Lady Barres. I insinuated my fears that Lady Barres did not like the family, but urged that it was important she should; for reasons which it would not be difficult for him to guess, though I could not explain them. I added that it was a whim of mine to wish they should all meet under his lordship's roof, and I trusted to his *extraordinary kindness* to excuse it.

I cared for nothing but to see Lady Barres nonplussed by meeting Maya under circumstances which would oblige her to behave politely. She dared not at present do anything, not only that would offend, but that would not absolutely please Lord Normanville.

Lord Normanville granted my request, and went beyond it, for he did not tell Lady Barres whom she was going to meet. Poor man! how I esteemed him. He had by this time found, in the depths of his honest nature, the key to the cipher by which he read Lady Barres' character. His countenance betrayed this in its dignified dejection and resigned eye; yet ennobled by the pride of character which prevented his withdrawing from the engagement to which he had pledged himself. I believe he even fathomed her treachery towards me. Had he discovered that she was a veritable witch whom he was about to espouse—one who held his life as well as his peace in her own hands—he would still have espoused her; still treated her with honourable kindness, and tried to better her by his influence. I mention this in justice to his memory, for now he is at peace.

Lord Normanville gave, not merely a dinner, but a magnificent entertainment: there were fifty persons present. I shall never forget Lady Barres' face when her sharp long sight detected Maya among the guests, with her aunt and her brother. But her

ladyship showed consummate tact; for she behaved exactly as though she had not been introduced to them before: she bowed coolly but politely, as to perfectly new faces, and warmed very gradually; still did warm, for she foresaw that she would have to receive them as equals. She was too subtle to treat them as inferiors, for of inferiors she would none: she never condescended, because she would only associate with her equals; assuming, of course, that she had no superiors.

As for Lord Normanville, he treated Maya with more distinction than any person present, except Lady Barres; and had he been George's father he could not have contrived with more affectionate tact to connect Maya and George together—not by intimation which could pain or perplex them, but by glance and gesture, such as an elder may use towards the young and fair. He also prepared every one to hear of their engagement, which was announced a few weeks afterwards. Lady Barres was obliged not only to bear his behaviour, but to share it; and she was enforced that very evening to ask Maya to grace her wedding, just at hand.

As for the other ladies, the long lane of their social straightforwardness had turned already. On the night of George's quadrille there had not been any one present who could trace the nationality of the Henrys in their countenances.

British beauty is of so mixed a character that my

friends might have been considered only foreign-looking—a characteristic which merges so many and various combinations of the soft Saxon, the glowing Norman, and the vigorous Celt.

Now, however, it had been announced that they were of a Polish family: Mr. Henry, having no longer a motive for concealment, gloried in proclaiming his country; though still preserving the secret of his ancestral name, until he could claim his estates and honours. However, when once known to be a Pole, he passed into the torrid zone of popularity, and became the rage for the rest of the season. For in the world, the immortal soul and the immortal cause are alike prized and served according to the fascination which the *individual* exercises over the hearts of the many; not according to the worth of the soul or the righteousness of the cause.

Mr. Henry, quite as much as Maya, might have been *fêted* everywhere; they received invitations of all kinds, and many from very superior people: indeed they might have lived amongst the great world of rank and fashion for a whole month, which is about the limit of the endurance of "a rage."

If I had been in Maya's place, I fear I should have refused to go to Lady Barres' wedding; but she did not, her nature being too lofty for such resentment. Lady Barres was married, and we were all present; the ceremony was what is called very private; that is, as it took place after everybody had left town, the

guests had to come up from their country houses. Rowena and I were bridesmaids, the youngest of the twelve. Maya was not one. Lady Barres was watchful and worried upon her bridal morning; but she looked beautiful, if not amiable, for she did not attempt to appear younger than she was. She wore no flowers, but a tiara of emeralds; a rich green dress with a train of silver brocade, and a short veil of silver lace. The ceremony impressed me with its dulness, its brevity, and its want of what artists call incident. At the breakfast all was brilliant except the spirits of the company. Rowena succeeded in stealing one of Hugh de Brabazone's seamless gloves, while he kept one of hers; which showed that the ceremony proved suggestive, at least in one instance.

Rowena was left with the duchess, and went with her to Cheltenham; while Lord and Lady Normanville went over to the Continent. When alone together in a companionship for life, how do uncongenial persons feel themselves? The matrimonial abyss is silent as the grave. I remained with Maya and her aunt, who spoiled me for all other female society.

George did not hint at the consummation of his hopes all through the autumn, whereat I marvelled. But, observing my cousin, I discovered it was not only to the voice of his heart that he listened; he also obeyed the dictates of his understanding: which taught him that a man like Mr. Henry, in leaving

his sister in a foreign land, ought to have the security of her happiness *tested*, and should be able to confide her to one whose friendship and devotion *she* had proved, as well as her brother.

George had to visit Ashleigh frequently, returning as soon as possible to town; or rather to a cottage in its environs, which Mr. Henry had taken for three months. We all became very fond of this cottage, and attributed to it a future romance which it was doomed to forego; for after all Maya did not step from its threshold a bride.

By the middle of November the mild weather fell to frost, with bitter winds. The thorn-bushes were loaded with their small scarlet fruits, and a robin flew in at the window when it was opened on the morning of the first of December; in fact the weather favoured George. He invited us all to go to Ashleigh for Christmas, and would take no denial. He added that Mr Henry could of course take his sister away after dinner on Christmas Day; or that Maya might remain, if she pleased, in her own room: these and other incoherences being called forth by Mr. Henry's proud disinclination to let his sister go to Ashleigh before her marriage. But now George was resolute, and induced his beloved and beautiful friend to put a period to Mr Henry's proprieties by fixing her marriage day. Mr. Henry would not set out for Ashleigh until Christmas Eve, though George had left town some days before. I had stayed to

accompany Maya, and I could but smile at her brother's determination to carry her away from Ashleigh the morning after Christmas Day. However, we had not gone one stage when it began to snow, and before we were out of Kent the ground was whitened. The snow thickened and deepened every moment, until within ten miles of Ashleigh the postchaise laboured through three feet of drift, every flake freezing as it fell; and by the time we reached the park gates it would have been impossible to go any further.

Ashleigh had not been modernised, but improved. The frames of carving in the hall now enclosed the fresh gilt frames of their own old pictures, reclaimed from cellar and lumber room; the dining-room was splendid with its purple hangings and richly-covered sideboard of plate; and the drawing-rooms were superbly decorated and furnished. Above all, the portrait-gallery was restored: every Vaux had there his image, from mailed Ranulf with his star, to Edward in his black coat, with his bible; there were also Beatrices, so like myself that I started at the resemblance.

The snow continued to fall incessantly. On Christmas Day the chapel in the house was filled with guests, as no one could get to the parish church. For several days we were snowed up: the snow did not melt, and the clouds went on adding to its depth. Very suddenly a thaw ensued: one morning, three

weeks after Christmas, on looking out of our windows, lo! the snow had all gone, the grass seemed greener than ever, birds sang in the leafless trees, and the sun glittered: everybody hailed the welcome change. Agreeably as the company had been entertained, the guests now spoke of dispersing; many had other visits to pay, and all felt that their host's heart was not, as they say at public meetings, "with them." Indeed it was quite an event when Maya came among them; and therefore George's heart was in the little turret where her room was situated: a chamber remote from all.

At breakfast, on the morning of the thaw, George requested his guests, however anxious they were to depart (as he was aware they had reason to be), to remain until the following afternoon. This was a request impossible to refuse; particularly as he told them, with pleasant significance, that he hoped they would not stay any longer than the time he mentioned. Mr. Henry was at breakfast, and did not raise his eyes, conscious that his old pupil's eyes were upon *him:* Maya was breakfasting in the turret with her aunt.

After breakfast, George, taking Mr. Henry's arm, drew him out of the hall, smiling me an invitation to follow. We three went to the turret, and George knocked at Maya's door. Maya, who was just then making a frock for a little child whose father had been frozen to death, put down the tiny garment, and

looked rather surprised at this visitation; especially when George said, "I have brought my two witnesses to your promise for to-morrow, which I have not forgotten, and now entreat you to fulfil." In fact, the next day had been settled for their marriage.

George, whose forecast had arranged everything, carried his point triumphantly. Maya urged that she had not a suitable dress, whereupon George produced one:—a most beautiful bridal robe, the work of a French maid whom he had brought from town for his future wife; a lady's maid with more than L'Estrange's cleverness and none of her impertinence, and who had taken Maya's measure with her eye, and fitted her as that fairy of old time fitted the Princess with her three robes of sky, and cloud, and rainbow.

The chapel next morning presented a most picturesque aspect. Holly, laurestinas, laurel, and other evergreens, wreathed banner, escutcheon, and monument; the azure star and crimson rose of Vaux, in the painted windows, glowed with the sunshine that streamed upon the altar; the pavement and steps were carpeted with purple velvet strewed with snowdrops. The ceremony was really an impressive solemnity; only disturbed by the flutter of curiosity which prompted the guests to peep at the book in which Maya wrote her maiden signature—her real name—for the first and last time: it was a name denoting a lineage higher than that of the highest there.

After the *déjeûner*—that banquet to be endured and forgotten, and at which the congratulatory speeches were, as usual, failures—all the guests left Ashleigh, leaving Lord and Lady Ailye there.

Miss Henry, Mr. Henry, and I, returned to town together, taking with us Spencer and Wilton Vaux, now yellow-haired laddies of a stately growth, with more of the Gordon than Vaux. They stayed with us at the cottage until the spring, when we all went to Ashleigh on a visit.

Mr. Henry had already left England and was now at Warsaw. The patriot passion, so long smothered, fanned again by hope, burned brightly in his soul; its ardent flame fed by fresh aspirations: and if there had been melancholy in his farewell greeting, it was surely because so much of apprehension, as well as hope, beset the undertaking that for long and weary years had been the cherished aim of his being.

To the chronicle of my first season must be added an episode of later experience.

The character of Maya and the career of George have neither deteriorated nor dwindled by time. In these days moderate talents and practical virtues secure earlier success than exceptional genius, against which stubborn mediocrity will rebel. At a time of political perversion, therefore, George has taken a high place: but, strange to say, he had not long *experienced* the charms and responsibilities of office

before he resolved that no son of his, unless self-prompted, should be educated to follow in his steps. Having redeemed his youthful pledge by becoming a statesman in time of peace, he manifested his devotion to his country by training his boys for her service in time of war; and the time has now arrived for testing their promise among ten thousand others. The eldest, having evinced a childish passion for the sea, was separated from his brothers when they joined the army; and they, two mere boys, fought side by side till the youngest fell, upon his maiden field, last year. This death of a dear and duteous child was the first shadow cast by Heaven upon a home till then too brightly happy.

Maya's course has been successful too; as there are for women other and more precious triumphs than those of public life. She always held some views not fashionably orthodox; for instance, she denies that because a man is absorbed in political interests, he and his wife can never be "an hour alone." Also she asserts that a mother who educates her daughters under her own eye, can likewise fulfil the social duties—if not exactions—which are the support and ornament of high position.

The beauty of Lady Ailye, before her marriage perhaps too delicate for popular appreciation, expanded under the amenities of those refined social enjoyments which afterwards surrounded her, to a *perfection* rare in England. Neither "passionnée"

for politics, nor infatuated by the patriotism which often misleads our sex, she is eminently feminine in her devotion to her husband, whose land she loves because it contains her home. For the first year of her marriage she submitted entirely to custom, and was the "rage" of that season. Her entertainments were most brilliant and original, being varied by the richness of her foreign taste: thus, in some sort she made a return for the homage she received abroad; and she bore away the palm even from among the successful few who arbitrate for the striving many. The next year she was looked for, of course, eagerly and not without envy; but she was then a mother, and the claims of society were subordinate to those of her home duties. Amongst the refined and the exalted only she moved and found her friends.

Her eldest daughter is a mild and gentle Beatrice; most unlike her godmamma; resembling but not rivalling her mother in beauty. This young lady is not anxious to leave her home, though already she has had many solicitations to choose one for herself. Maya, the second daughter, just out, has a high spirit, which I hope may be bent without breaking her heart. There are other girls, opening buds of childhood, and a baby-boy who, in delicacy of organization and sweetness of nature, is an angel among them all.

Lord Normanville, who was ever to me the kindest

of friends, died rather suddenly of heart complaint, in the sixth year after his marriage with Lady Barres. To his great satisfaction she had brought him one son, a fairy-like infant, with marble brow and golden hair. This child—the idol-angel of poor Lord Normanville — died when four years old, having scarcely grown since its birth, except in beauty. I believe its death accelerated that of its father, so deeply and bitterly he sorrowed. Still, as the disease which destroyed him alike baffles forecast and defies remedy, it may be that under happier circumstances he would not have lived.

Lady Barres had sacrificed the jointure appending to her first widowhood by marrying Lord Normanville, and she had but a small private fortune; for that of her son, Lord Barres, (or what was left of it,) at his death, passed, with the estate to a distant relative.

The earldom of Normanville and its estates, including the ancestral park and chase, a town house, Border castle and villa on the cliffs of Devon, all fell to the share of Hugh de Brabazone; who had already a superb property of his own. Rowena married Hugh de Brabazone, after dallying a few months with his proposals, lest she might lose the chance of others; finding that none came, and fearing to lose the *éclat* of a marriage at eighteen, she finally espoused him with precipitation, and complacently *assumed her dignities*. By becoming Countess of

Normanville she found these magnified beyond her most sanguine hopes and most aspiring dreams. And as for the dowager countess, of those advantages which she had so skilfully selected for herself, there remained to her none whatever; she was doomed to behold them enjoyed by one whom she had despised even more than she dreaded me: indeed, had it not been for the generous provision of her second lord, she would have had to crave admission into the list of those designated by the "black book" as "pensioned for poverty."

As for Rowena, her faults being negative, negative is also her reward. Not yet wise enough to declare that all is vanity, she only finds that all is weariness. Yet blessed may be the fruit of the tree of knowledge, if the bitter taste it leaves within the soul it surfeited should create immortal longings for the fruit of the Tree of Life,

Burnett married Savage; for although Lady Normanville did not see that he was made house-steward, her lord set him up in a shop, and as a respectable tradesman he was, of course, still superior to Burnett. She had, however, better have been "a mad dog or a dead cat," as she expressed it, than have married Savage, for he would dine at six o'clock every evening, sit late over his wine, and rise at ten to breakfast. To his wife he left the duty of keeping the books; but, as her calculations had been confined to the cost of dress and millinery, she failed in the grocery

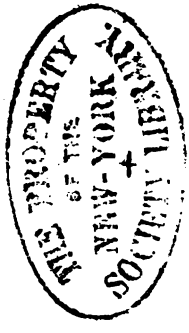
ne: between them both the shop went to smash. avage then took another service, and Burnett went › America, with an outfit and passage provided by ord Normanville. I believe she would marry again, nly she is not sure of Savage's death; nor is she ware that *he* had married again.

L'Estrange stayed with Lady Normanville, and anaged to have a continually increasing salary, ith "perquisites" ad libitum! but of course she uitted on the earl's death. She possessed heaps of resses, scarcely worn, which she remodelled and sold. She went on governing the great, whom she served, nd ultimately became proprietor of a large court-nillinery establishment; *now* she rules the aristocracy f fashion, as she once ruled Lady Barres. She ever married, being too prudent and too selfish.

Mr. Henry has only been twice to England since is sister's marriage. His patriotism and devoted urpose are not yet rewarded; but *he* is rewarded ith the love and honour of his race: not an incon-istency has marred his course. His noble destiny orbids me to frame the wish that I might have shared t. The fire has passed upon him, for his hair reflects silver light over its raven shades, and his graceful igure bends; but still the glance of life and energy s unquenched within his eye; still he hopes on, and hile he lives will ever hope.

And at this crisis, when the confused noise of war s heard afar amidst the nations, and raiment "rolled

in blood" troubles our nightly dreams—when old enemies, united as brothers, are fighting against *the* enemy side by side—one may hope that the rights of Poland will be restored, with those of other nations struggling against their oppressors. The day may yet be distant, but will surely dawn, when this glorious people—long-suffering but not dejected—shall be again a nation, and be hailed as the only barrier against the barbarians of the north.



THE END.

London: SMITH, ELDER and Co., Little Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey